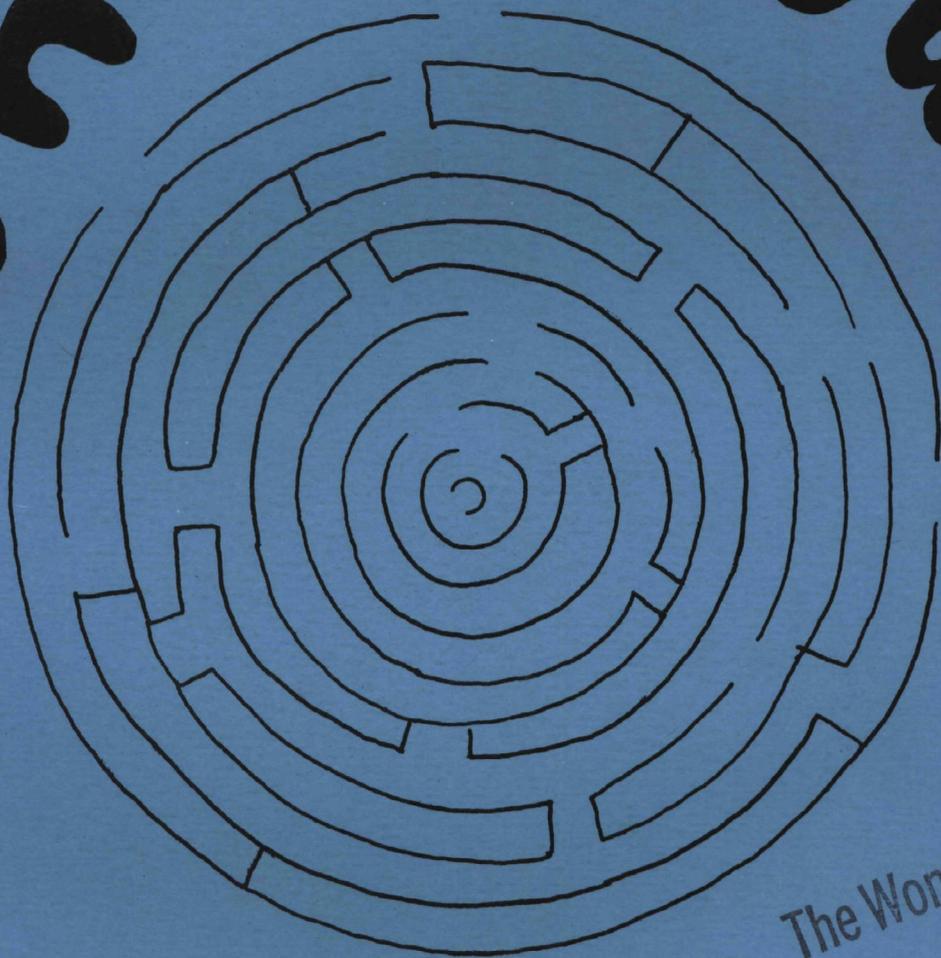


What Now?



The Women's Center

Under 18 and pregnant

A discussion of pregnancy and abortion, written for young women by young women.

The Women's Center
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HEALTH/ pregnancy + childbirth

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What Now: Under Eighteen and Pregnant

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What Now: Under Eighteen and Pregnant

That time of the month has come and gone. You've missed a period. You know you've had sex during the month. What do you do? Tell your mother or a friend? Wait? Get a pregnancy test?

"I knew from the first night in bed that I was pregnant." "I knew it right then and there."

"First off, when I missed a period, the first thing I did was panic. Then I called my doctor for an appointment. While I was waiting for the results of the pregnancy test I was really out of it."

"My body felt stranger to me. I knew that something was inside of me or my body chemistry was changing."

Once you know you are pregnant, you have to make up your mind whether or not to go through with the pregnancy or have an abortion. You're probably wondering how other people have felt who have been where you are. We interviewed a number of women between the ages of twelve and eighteen who either went through a pregnancy or had an abortion. Some of them thought keeping the baby was fine, and others thought having an abortion was the right thing to do. It's your decision. No one can make up your mind for you. Many people can help you decide, but it's you that will take the first step. It's your body that will deliver a baby or experience an abortion.

In this pamphlet we want to share with you what we learned from the women we interviewed. We also want to share with you medical information on pregnancy and abortion. We hope that this pamphlet will help you decide "What to do Now!"

How to Get a Pregnancy Test

In order to have an accurate test done, you must be at least two weeks late for your menstrual period. You should make an appointment with one of the following: your doctor, gynecologist, local hospital clinic, or medical building. If you are not familiar with any of the above, try contacting your local planned parenthood, or hotline. They will refer you to the nearest place that does pregnancy tests.

There are different types of pregnancy tests. The most commonly used is a two-minute slide test, which is done on first morning urine. It must be your first morning urine or else the test will not be valid. You should collect your urine as soon as you wake up in the morning. Put your sample in a clean, dry, soap free jar which can be covered and kept in the refrigerator until it is time to be tested. In order to prepare for this test, it is best not to drink after midnight the night before the test. Also it is important not to take an excessive amount of any drug (aspirin or marijuana), as drugs may effect the outcome of the test. Results of the test are usually given within twenty-four hours. The cost varies, but usually runs about five dollars.

If the results are negative, you are not pregnant. You should wait about another week for your period. If it doesn't come, you should make an appointment with your doctor in order to be examined and find out why you have missed your period.

If the results are positive, you are pregnant. You should make an appointment for a pelvic exam. The doctor will do what is known as a sizing.. A sizing is done to find out how far along you are. At eight to nine weeks pregnant your uterus or womb is the size of a plum, ten to eleven weeks you are the size of an orange, and twelve weeks the size of a grapefruit.

Completed Pregnancy

The feelings of the women who had completed a pregnancy ranged from beautiful, meaningful, and intense to scary, tiresome, and painful.

"I ran around a lot when I was pregnant. It didn't slow me down any. I worked up until a week before I had him."

"I'm scared about going through delivery. And I'm worried about the baby being healthy."

"I was wicked excited when I found out I was pregnant. I wanted to have a baby. I was proud and happy."

"I didn't like nothin' about being pregnant."

No matter what situation you're in, pregnancy will bring up many things to be dealt with: medical care, parents, the father of the child, school, motherhood and/or adoption.

Since you've decided to go through with your pregnancy, you must now decide what kind of medical care you will be receiving. You can either go to a private doctor or a local hospital clinic. Whatever you choose, it is very important that you are comfortable with your decision. Some doctors may not accept your case because you are under eighteen. If you are unwed, there may be a few doctors who will bug you about giving the child up. If you get into one of these situations it might be a good idea to change your doctor.

"I was more comfortable seeing the same doctor all the time rather than seeing different ones at the clinic. But it doesn't really bother me that much."

"They (the doctors) were all good except for one. He pressured me into giving him up. I kept telling him no."

It will probably be important to you that your parents accept that you are pregnant and understand why you want to go through with the pregnancy. However, having a pregnant adolescent daughter is very hard for most parents to deal with in the beginning

Of all the people we interviewed, most of them had mothers who freaked out at first but calmed down after a few months and accepted the fact that their daughters were pregnant. It is really helpful to have your parents behind you, especially if your not married. They may be able to give you financial support, More important they may give you emotional support, which you will need while you are pregnant.

"Then I told my mother, that wasn't very easy. I left her a note saying I needed to talk to her. She yelled and screamed and hollered and cried. She wanted me to get an abortion. The doctor said I had to make up my mind in a week. I didn't want one, but she wanted me to have one. Then she was all right after that. She decided I was going to give it up until the day I went into labor. I was in labor and she decided I could keep it. When she said it was O.K.--I could bring her home--she said she'd do all she could."

"I was afraid to tell my father. I didn't want to hurt him. I wanted to continue school, but couldn't."

"I turned my back on my mother and faced the wall."

"We weren't even sure I was pregnant, but just the thought made her embarassed. She was afraid of what the neighbors would think."

"She got mad because I didn't go to her first."

"They were good to me after I delivered."

"My father never said a thing about it."

"My mother and I get along good now."

"He (my father) didn't really give a shit, to put it bluntly. 'Good luck!' 'Just keep out of my life.'"

If you and the father of the baby are on good terms, you might consider marriage or living together. If you do want to get married, you should sit down and make sure it's what you both want. A marriage for the baby's sake might end up in a divorce. That could just create more emotional problems.

"My boyfriend thought it was great."

"Me and my boyfriend both go to the prenatal classes. We both want to see the baby born."

"We were anyway (going to get married). It just came before we knew it. We just figured we were made for each other."

Many women are left without a father for their baby. The father is not able to take the responsibility of being a father or he doesn't want to. He may not want anything to do with you anymore or you may not want any part of him.

"At first, he said it wasn't his, but then he admitted it."

"He said it wasn't his. He was the only one that I was messin' around with at the time. So, I just decided to leave."

"I was afraid to tell the father. I didn't want to hurt him."

Even though you are pregnant you still have to go on with your normal life. You may want to continue with school. This may be hard during and after pregnancy because you might be sick (with morning sickness), out of school for your delivery, staying home to take care of your child, taking time off when he/she is sick, or going to work to support you and your child. Here are some of the experiences of the women we interviewed.

"I stayed in school, but they didn't let me graduate. The first year it was cause I missed so much time when I was out having her (the baby). The second year I went back, she had the chicken pox for two weeks. So I had to stay home with her. They told me it was an illegitimate reason for staying out of school. So they kicked me out."

"They had me going to school. I went for a little while, then I dropped out."

If you do not stay with the father of the baby, and get involved with another man, you may have some problems because of the fact that you have a child. Your new boyfriend may or may not like your child. You might want to find a man who will accept your child.

"He (my boyfriend) loves me but Robin's not his. He really has a feeling about that, and that's what holds him back all the time. And it's changed things between us."

Sometimes a women will choose to give up her child for adoption because she feels she is not capable of bringing it up well. She may not be living in a situation where it would be possible, or her parents may tell her she has to give it up. You may choose to put the baby up for adoption because you feel it will be best for the child. Some women feel this is a true act of love. You have to try to decide for yourself how you will feel.

No one can force you to sign adoption papers. It is illegal for anyone to adopt your child unless you sign the papers. Various agencies (such as Welfare, Catholic Charities, Children's Protective Society) can legally force you to put your baby in foster care, if they feel you aren't a good mother. They can take you to court and try to prove you an unfit mother. If they succeed, your child can be put in foster care for a number of years.

"The foster home I was in, the foster mother had a hysterectomy and she said I couldn't keep it there because it would bother her very much. And they said they weren't gonna get me another foster home where I could keep it. The only other choice I had was to give it up for adoption or else to put it in a foster home for four years until I was eighteen. Then I had to be proven a fit mother. It wouldn't have been right to get the baby at eighteen because the baby wouldn't really know me. It would be close to the foster home."

Did the women we talked to regret going through their pregnancies? There was no one answer. Some felt happy with their decisions. They wanted the baby or else they felt and still feel abortion is wrong for them. Some felt they might have done differently if they had to do it again. Some were not sure.

You must trust the decision you make. The only way you'll ever know is to experience what you think is right. Most of the women managed to make it through their pregnancies pretty well and the ones who kept their babies are still trying to make the best of it.

"I just figured I would always find a way."

Pregnancy

Remember the choices we talked about,
The things we carefully thought out,
Decisions even now we doubt.

The child of passion we let in
Is deemed a child conceived "in sin."

People label me young and wild,
Though as a woman I conceived your child.

Is it so wrong that I demand,
Only that they understand?
But what are lies and what is real?
It doesn't matter what I feel.

by Katie Espinola

Pregnancy: The Facts

If your decision is to keep the baby, it would help you to know what pregnancy is all about.

"All I know is you went for nine months with a big belly."

Many changes will take place in your body as the fetus develops in you. You might feel many discomforts, few, or none at all.

The first twelve weeks of pregnancy: the first trimester

The following things may or may not happen to you. During the first twelve weeks your body doesn't change much on the outside, but changes are happening inside.

You may have to go to the bathroom a lot more, because the water balance of your body is different. You hold more liquid.

Your breasts will probably swell. They might feel tender or hurt. There will be more blood in your breasts. As a result, you will see your veins more. Your nipples may get darker around the outside. They may get larger.

You might feel like you have to throw up, because your system is changing. If you feel like you have to throw up, eat lightly throughout the day rather than taking large meals. Munching crackers or dry toast slowly before you get up in the morning can really help.

Carefully avoid greasy, spicy foods, like pizza or french fries. Avoid going a long time without eating.

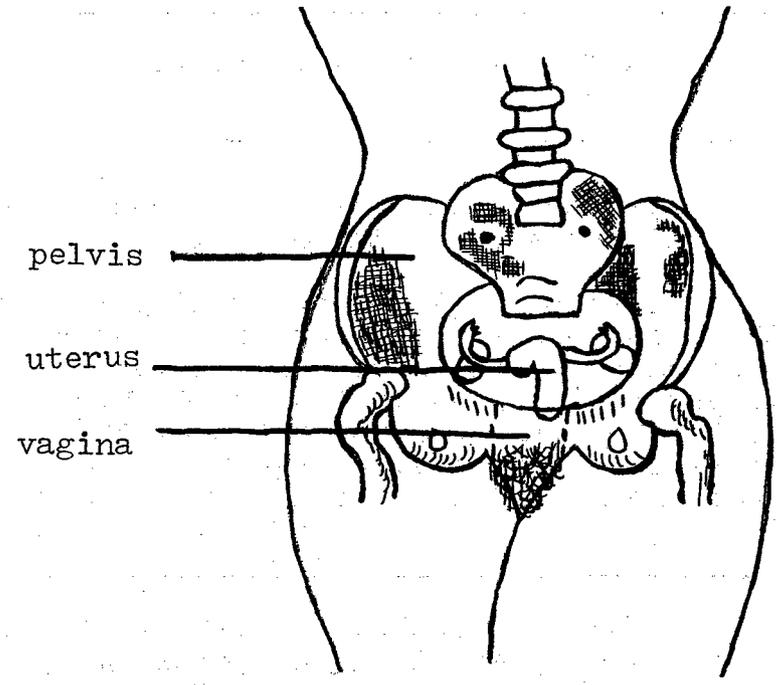
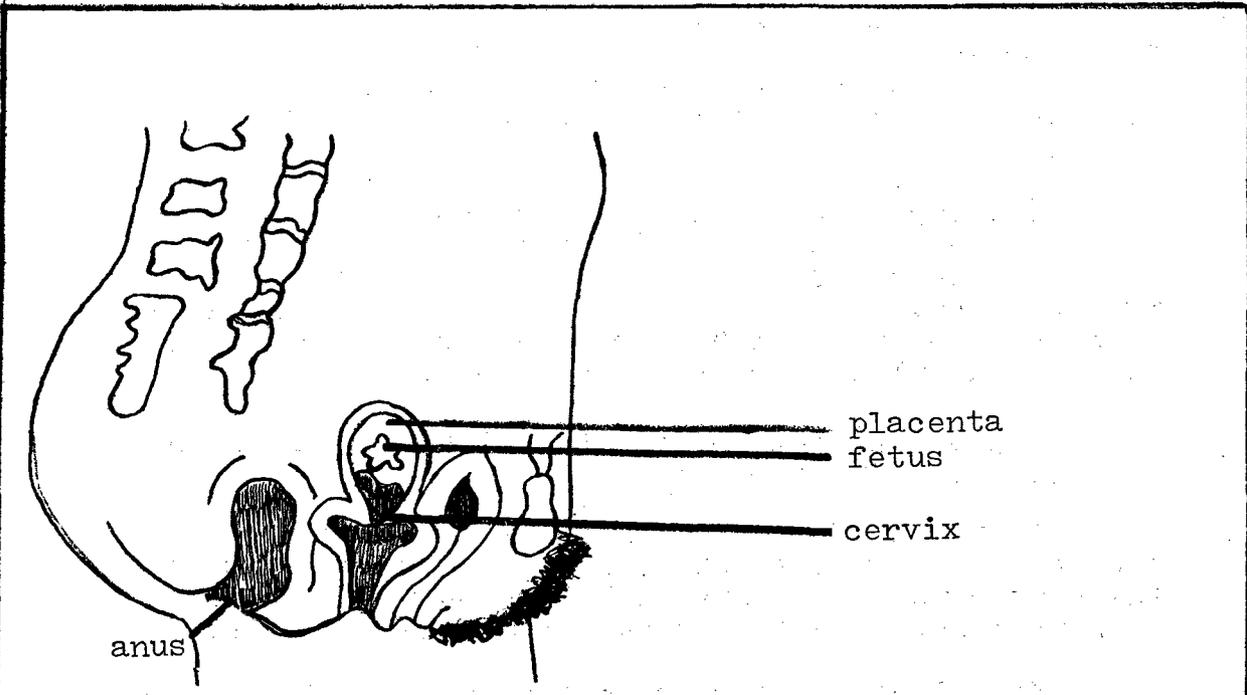
"Something felt different, but I didn't feel sick. My second pregnancy was like that too. I had a strange feeling, but I wasn't sick."

"I got sick right away, as soon as I missed my period. I wanted to throw up. I got medication. If I take the pills, the nausea goes away."

"I used to get up for school some mornings, and run to the bathroom. On my way I must have dropped four times. I kept going, 'Ma, get out of there quick!' She said, 'Why? You gonna do your thing again.' That was the worst thing about the whole pregnancy, the morning sickness. I had morning sickness for about two hours every morning. It lasted a month and a half."

Words You'll Need to Know

1. ANUS: The opening to the rectum.
2. BOWEL MOVEMENT: Shit
3. CERVIX: The opening between the vagina and the womb.
4. DISCHARGE: Liquid material flowing from the body.
5. FETUS: A baby while in the womb is called a fetus.
6. PELVIS: Female bone structure holding the female organs.
7. PLACENTA: The placenta is the source of nourishment to the baby.
8. SPECULUM: An instrument the doctor uses to open the walls of the vagina.
9. TRIMESTER: Three month stage of pregnancy. There are three trimesters in a normal nine month pregnancy.
10. UTERUS: The space in the body where the baby or fetus grows; also called the womb.
11. VAGINA: The passage leading from the uterus to the outside of the body.



You may have irritation in your vagina. You might notice yellow or white stains on your under-pants. If you notice a lot of itching or pain, see your doctor. A slight white increase is to be expected.

You may have trouble having bowel movements. This is because the fetus is growing, and pressing on your bowels. You may feel more tired these first twelve weeks; and therefore you are not moving around as much. You may not have regular bowel movements. Eating bran flakes or prunes may help.

Fourth, fifth, and sixth months of pregnancy:
The second trimester

About the fourth month the fetus becomes larger. Your waist becomes thicker, and you may begin to feel the baby move. This may feel like butterflies in your stomach. You are probably gaining weight now.

You might sweat more, which is helpful in getting rid of waste products. Remember you are also getting rid of the baby's waste products. Sometimes you may get cramps in your legs and feet when you wake up. Standing on the floor in bare feet, and stretching will relieve this.

"All I ever got was cramps in my legs, nothing else."

If you notice your skin becoming dry, you may rub the dry areas with baby oil.

Your milk glands are really working now, so that your breasts are larger and heavier. It is necessary to wear a bra that gives good support. If you notice a white discharge from your nipples, wash them with soap and clean water daily. If there is a lot of discharge put a gauge pad over your nipples so seepage does not occur.

"About 6 months, my milk started leaking, I'd wake up at night and be all wet, and the milk stuck to the cups of my bra."

Remember during these months your body is getting rid of waste products for you and your baby. You may have indigestion, heartburn, or constipation.

A well balanced diet is very important at this time, because the food you eat is not only taking care of you but your baby too. Try to eat meat, fish, eggs, fresh fruit, vegetables, cereals and milk every day. Drink a lot of fluids but avoid coffee and carbonated beverages. (See Nutrition section for more information on this.)

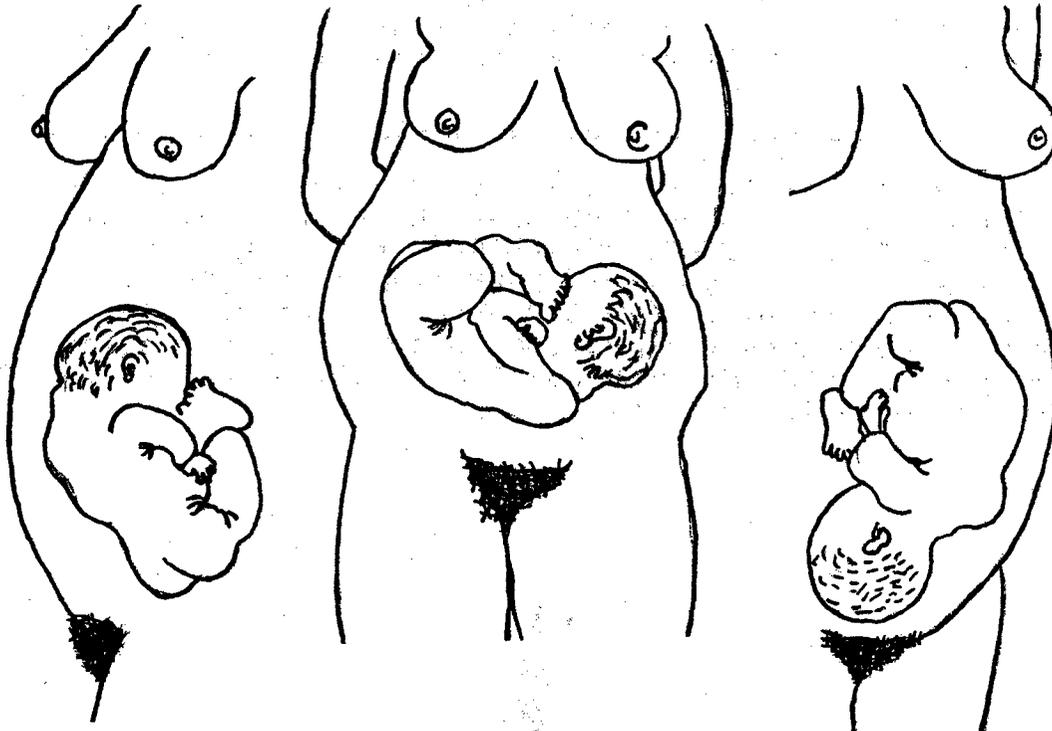
Normal physical activity is good, but avoid strenuous exercises; such as lifting heavy objects, and getting on ladders to paint ceilings.

"I am starting to get tired climbing stairs, and the heat bothers me."

Seventh, eighth and ninth months of pregnancy: The third trimester.

During the third trimester you may feel the baby moving a lot more. You can actually see the baby moving from the outside now by looking at your stomach. The movements of the baby can put pressure on your bladder. You may feel like you have to go to the bathroom more often than before.

During the last part of your pregnancy, because of the size of the baby and the position of the baby, you may have some back pain. Laying down with your feet raised will help this discomfort. Your doctor or nurse can help you discover which position the baby is in.



Sometimes you may have a shortness of breath, and this too is caused by the position of the baby. Sometimes you will not feel movement because the baby is sleeping.

If you don't feel movement for three to four days and you're wondering, call your doctor and ask whether s/he thinks it's a good idea to check the baby's heart-beat. But remember sometimes your baby lies still. These periods of "rest" for the baby can last several days.

This is the time you will feel your uterus tighten every now and then. These are painless contractions called Braxton-Hicks contractions. They are believed to strengthen uterine muscles. They are practice contractions for when real labor begins.

The peak load on your heart, occurs in about the thirtieth week. After that, the heart doesn't have to work so hard. You are still gaining weight. Try to avoid standing up for long periods of time. When you sit or lie down, be sure your feet are raised.

During the last weeks of pregnancy you continue to gain weight. You are heavier; your baby is heavier; so your body is off balance. Your walk becomes a waddle.

"I lose my balance alot, like going down the stairs, I need to have someone with me."

"When I was about 7 to 9 months I received pressure pains below my navel which made me walk bending forward, like I was tying my shoes."

"I fell down in the snow once, right on my face. Walking down the street- dee da dee. I told my doctor. He said, don't worry about it, you'll need a lot harder blow than that to hurt him."

About four to two weeks before birth, sometimes earlier, your baby's head settles in the pelvis. This is called "lightening", "dropping" or "engagement." This takes the pressure off your stomach so you will be more comfortable. You can breathe easier. However there is more pressure on your bowels, so you may become constipated. So your waiting is almost over. Your baby is ready to be born.



This is called
"dropping" or
"engagement"

Nutrition

Your baby will be what you eat. It is important to watch what you eat, because you and your baby will benefit from eating good foods.

You'll feel healthy during your pregnancy and you will have fewer chances of anything going wrong during the delivery if you regulate your eating habits. Your good eating habits will make you feel better while you are pregnant and also look better. After you have your baby your skin will regain its natural elasticity, and you will return to your normal weight faster.

The health of your child before and after birth will depend on how well you take of yourself during pregnancy. Not only will your child be stronger at birth but it will also be stronger for the first year of its life.

Smoking, drinking (alcohol), and drugs, are all bad things for both you and your child. What you don't know may hurt you. You may not realize

it, but all of the above effect your child greatly. Alchohol and drugs, once into your blood stream, also get into the baby's. As you know, these drugs have an effect on your organs, especially your brain and liver. Therefore, they will have an effect on the fetus. Even aspirin has an effect. If it is possible, try not to drink or take drugs during your pregnancy. Before taking any non-prescription drugs ask your doctor about the effects they might have.

Food contains what your body needs in order to grow and stay healthy. All parts of our bodies--blood, bones, muscles, cells, hair, skin, finger nails--are built from the foods we eat. What you eat will effect what you will look and feel like.



Some of the foods that contain what you need are: fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat, fish, poultry, whole grain foods, and nuts, This is what you should normally eat:

Eggs: twice a week, preferably not fried.

Milk: 1 pint during first half of pregnancy, 1 quart during second half. If you don't like milk, there are many other dairy products available, such as, cottage cheese, ricotta cheese, or yogurt.

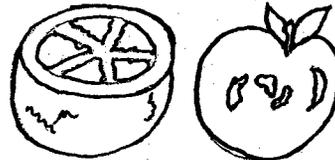
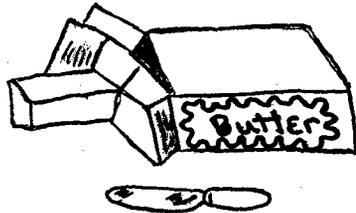
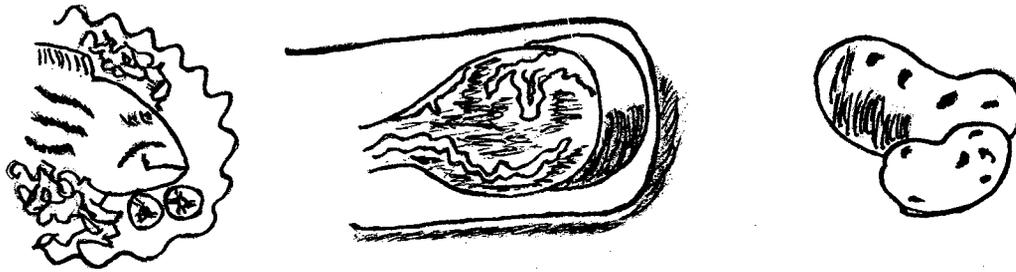
Meat, fish, cheese, poultry: 1 or 2 servings a day.

Vegetables: 2 or more servings a day.

Fruits: 2 or more servings a day.

Bread and Cereal: 1 or 2 servings a day.

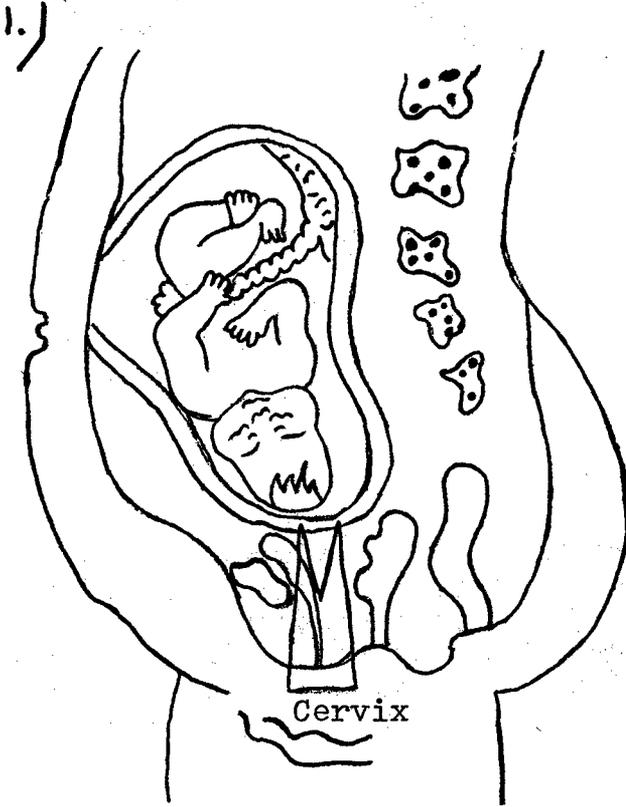
Butter or oil: 2 tbls. a day.



You will be hungrier during your pregnancy, and, as you well know, it is not good to stuff yourself with junk foods. So, here are some good snacks that you could eat between meals: raisins, wheat thins, apples, cottage cheese with chopped fruit, cheese, peanuts, orange juice, v-8 juice, strawberries, graham crackers, peanut butter, melons, and triscuits.

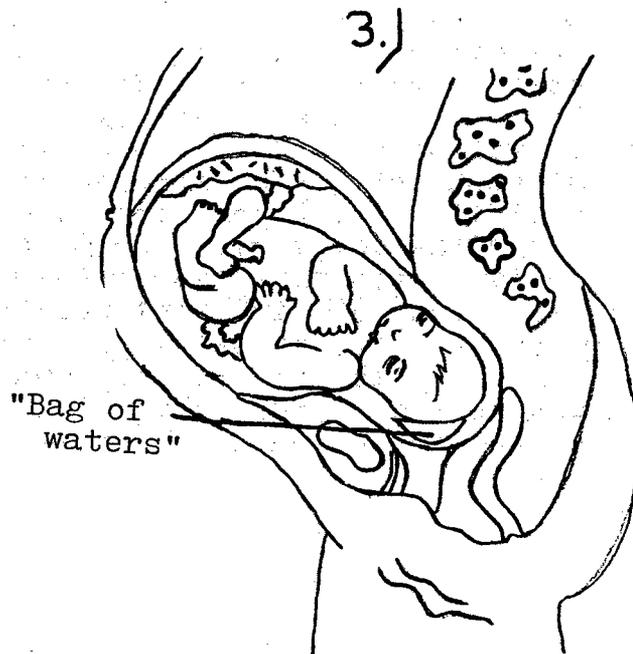
You must be very careful about maintaining your weight. Most doctors recommend keeping your weight gain somewhere between 20 and 30 lbs. Your doctor will be watching your weight gain during your whole pregnancy, but especially during your last months when it is very easy to gain weight. You must gain weight in order to have a normal and healthy baby. However, a large amount of weight gain during pregnancy can result in receiving stretch marks and varicose veins. It can also result in a difficult delivery and make it harder to lose weight after the delivery. You must also avoid eating salty foods. Salt makes you retain your fluids, which will cause you to gain extra weight. If you do gain too much weight, consult your doctor about a proper diet. Don't try to diet on your own, because you could hurt yourself and your baby. Ask your doctor for help with nutrition if you are confused.

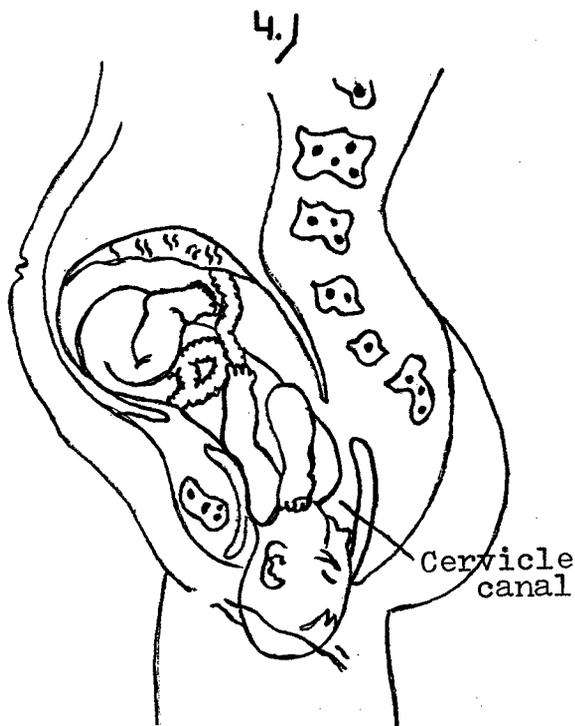
LABOR



When labor begins you will experience muscle pains in your stomach. At first these will be irregular and not too painful. These pains are muscles contracting to open the cervix. This opening has to be big enough to allow the baby's head to pass through.

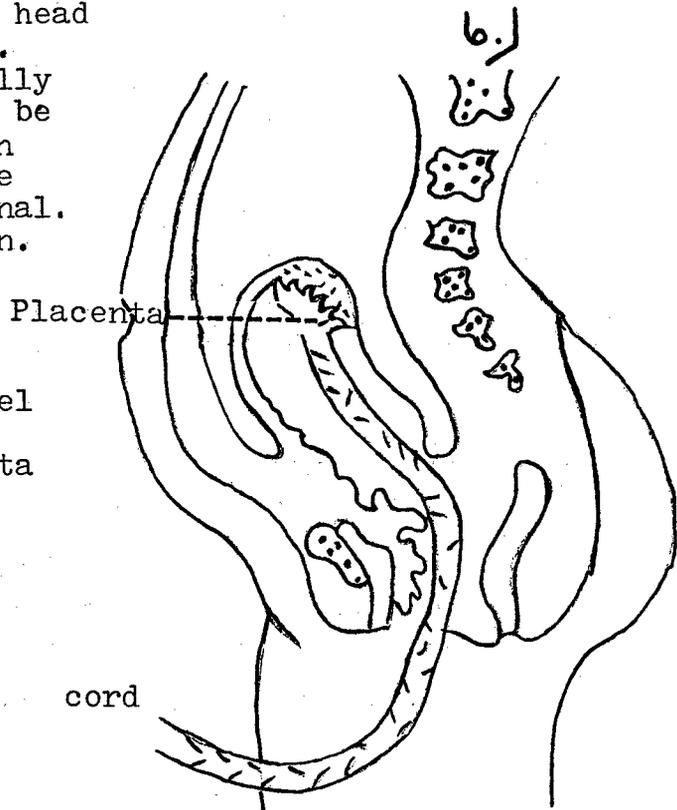
As the labor progresses, the contractions become stronger and more regular. These contractions mean that the cervix is gradually being stretched and widened. During this period you may be encouraged to push down with the pains.





When the bag of waters breaks, it means that the baby's head is in the cervicle canal. Now the contractions really get strong, and you will be urged to really push down hard. This will push the baby out of the birth canal. And the baby will be born.

Now the doctor will cut the umbilical cord. In a short time you will feel another contraction, and the afterbirth or placenta will be expelled at that time.



cord

The Delivery

You will know your labor has started, when you begin to have pain. These pains, or contractions, become stronger and come more often. If your waters break, call your doctor, or go to the hospital immediately.

When you go to the hospital, you are taken to the labor room. The nurse will shave your pubic hair, and vaginal area. She will give you an enema: (she will put liquid into your rectum to make sure your bowels are clean). Very often the enema will make your contractions stronger. You may be given a shot in the behind. This may be a tranquillizer to quiet you down, or a narcotic to ease the pain. You may be given a drug called "pitocin." This can be given into your vein or muscle. This drug makes your contractions stronger. You may be fed intravenously (through a vein in your arm) during the labor and delivery.

"I can't explain what it's like. I had some shots in the rear end. When the baby's head was coming, they gave me a spinal."

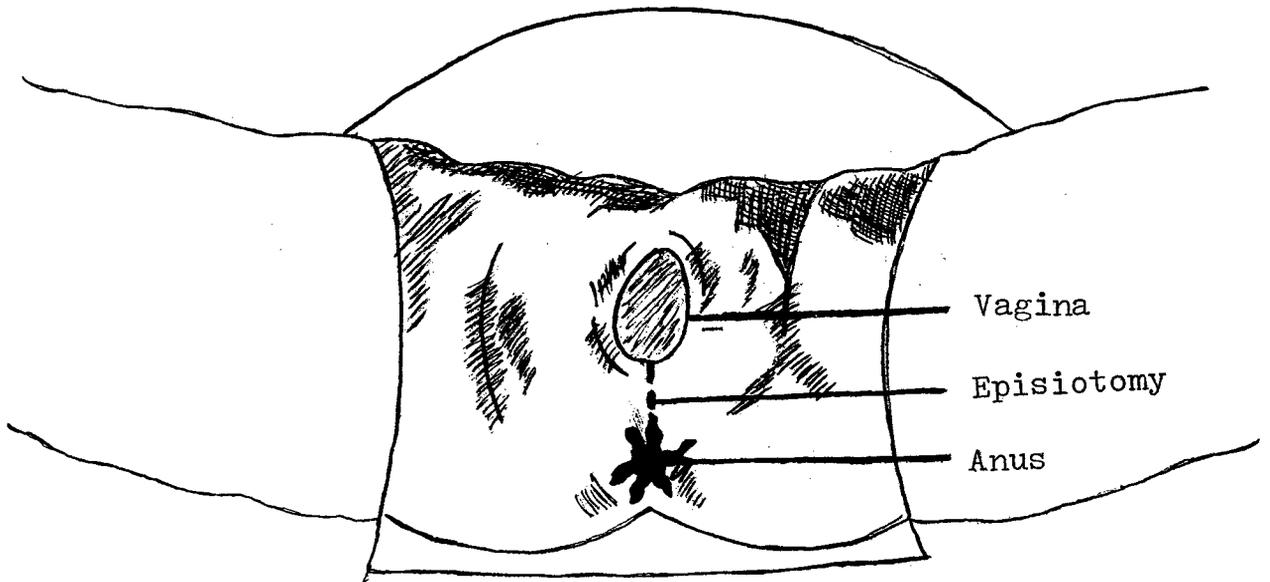
"Labor was strange, my water started leaking. The doctor said it would gush. I had no pain, so they induced my labor. Then, the contractions started."

You may be given some kind of anesthesia, during the actual delivery of the baby. This may be GENERAL- which means you will be put to sleep: or REGIONAL- which means only one part of the body is affected: or SPINAL- which means you would have no feeling from the waist down. The doctor may do an EPISIOTOMY- this is a cut between the vagina and the anus. He will make this incision just before the baby's head is born. After the placenta is expelled, he will close this opening with stitches. These stitches may be uncomfortable for a period of time after delivery.

"I felt great after delivery. The baby was perfect."

"The stitches hurt a lot. I didn't like having to get up, and feed the baby at night. The stitches hurt a lot then."

"I just watched my stomach when he was coming out. I was looking at the mirror and looking at my stomach and looking at the mirror. My stomach just started to go down."



Now your body starts to get back to a normal non-pregnant condition, a few hours after delivery. The uterus becomes hard, and will continue to contract in order to become smaller. These contractions are usually called "after-birth pains" You will have some vaginal discharge, which changes color from red to brown to white.

Your milk comes in two to three days after delivery. Your breasts will be swollen and may be sore. If you are not going to breast feed you can be given medication to dry up your milk.

Natural Childbirth

Natural or prepared childbirth is a birth without medication. This is a birth you prepare yourself for by attending childbirth classes. You will learn ways of breathing that will help you deal with labor and delivery. You will also learn physical exercises that will strengthen the muscles that you need to use in order to deliver the baby. Going to childbirth classes will help you understand what's going on in your body, and what's happening to your baby while you are in labor.

Some advantages of natural childbirth are:

1. You will know what's going on during labor.
2. And you won't "feel out of it" after delivery because of drugs.

3. Your baby will benefit from your relaxation because you will learn exercises that will help you work with the baby as it is moving out of your body. This makes it easier for the baby. The drugs they put in you, also go into the baby, which occasionally can cause problems for the baby.

If you are interested in prepared childbirth you should talk to your doctor or the clinic you go to, to find out where you can go for natural childbirth classes. There, you will learn breathing, exercises, and all about labor and delivery. The classes are for women of all ages, so don't be afraid to go to them if you are under eighteen. You don't have to be over eighteen to deliver naturally.

You will be asked to select a coach who will be with you in the hospital. This coach could be the father of the baby, a relative you are close to, or a friend. The coach will give you support and help you with the breathing during labor and delivery.

At the hospital you will be given an enema, and will be shaved as in medicated birth. Then you and your coach will be left to work with your labor.

As the contractions happen your friend or coach will remind you how to breathe and how to move to help the baby come out, and to help you ease your pain. Sometimes things happen so fast in labor that you can get confused. So, it is nice to have someone with you to help you deal with what's happening. Some of the things your coach might do would be: getting you a drink if you are thirsty, helping you to the bathroom, wiping the sweat from your face, calling the doctor or nurse if you need them, helping you change your position, and giving you moral support.

You will be checked occasionally until you are ready for delivery. Then, you go to the delivery room. Your coach will help you push the baby out. You should now receive a shot (like novocaine from the dentist). And then you get an episiotomy from your doctor. After the baby is born, you will be stitched up. This is not a painful procedure.

MISCARRIAGE

Miscarriage is a natural abortion, and can occur anytime during the first 6 months of pregnancy. Usually, it will happen during the first 3 months, but can take place up to the 6th month. One out of ten women miscarry. If you have any bleeding during your pregnancy, it may mean you are going to have a miscarriage. You may also have severe cramps. In fact, it may feel like a bad menstrual period. If you have these symptoms, you should get in touch with your doctor immediately, and lie down trying to move as little as possible.

"I thought I was having my normal period. I went back and sat down. Then I keeled over. I had to practically crawl to the bathroom. Instead of bleeding, it was coming out in big chunks.

Usually, after the doctor checks you out, you will have to rest for a few days and you will be O.K. You may continue to have bleeding for a week or more after you miscarry. It is important not to have sex for 4 to 6 weeks after you miscarry, as having sex could bring germs into your womb and cause an infection. Sometimes if the bleeding is very heavy and does not stop, you might have to be hospitalized. You may need an operation called a D+C. This procedure is done to clean out your womb, and make sure all the fetal material is removed.

Your body goes back to it's non-pregnant state quickly, your breasts are no longer swollen, and your stomach becomes soft again.

A miscarriage usually happens because, the egg does not grow in your womb properly. Possibly, your body is not ready to have a baby, because of illness or accident.

If you wanted the pregnancy, you may feel very sad because you have lost your baby. You should try to talk to friends about these feelings. If you didn't want the pregnancy, you may feel sad, but also relieved that you are no longer pregnant. Both feelings are normal and talking to friends, or someone you trust, will help you deal with what's happening with your body, and your mind.

"Everybody, during a miscarriage, goes through a physical or mental change. I think I went more towards the mental change. I felt like nothing was there. Everything was gone, kind of like a really sad feeling. It was an empty feeling. I felt like I wanted to know why. I could ask anybody and no one could give me a reason for it.

ABORTION

Of the women we interviewed, many were pleased with having an abortion. They felt it was the right thing to do. Other women, even though they felt that abortion was right for them at the time, didn't want another one. Some women felt bad or regretful towards having an abortion.

"As soon as I knew I was pregnant, I wanted an abortion. I just wanted to get it done with, and forget about it."

"It was a bad experience, but it was good for me to have an abortion, and not a baby. I never thought of keeping it. I always wanted to go to school and I didn't want anything to get in the way of that."

"I would have another abortion, because I don't want any kids right now."

"I felt happy after it was over."

"I've got a good head on my shoulders, and I thought it would be best for me. I think I made a good decision."

"I'd never do it again. I didn't have sex for a while, because I was afraid of getting pregnant again."

"I hope to never be in that situation again, but if I were, I'd do it again."

"The thing I want most now, is to have a baby, because of what happened."

Perhaps you're wondering what the father of your baby's reaction will be to having an abortion. He may be all for it, or he could have a negative reaction. He may feel he's not ready for the responsibility of a child. You may find he wants to avoid the whole thing, or he could be very supportive.

"I told the father of the baby, and he suggested an abortion, and he also paid for it."

"I had to get an abortion, because the father of the baby had three kids, and I didn't want the kid anyway."

"When I told my boyfriend, I thought he was going to beat the shit out of me, but instead he gave me two dozen roses."

"My fiancé still hasn't got over it. He still has a habit of rubbing my stomach. He felt bad."

"He's (the father) in the navy now. He wanted me to have it just to see if it (the baby) was a boy or girl. I told my girl friend to tell him it was a boy just to make him happy. I didn't want any more to do with him."

How will your family react? The reactions of your relatives and parents may push a little on your decision. It may be hard to keep track of your own feelings when they're all telling you what to do.

Now that abortions are allowed to women under the age of eighteen, you do not have to tell your parents about your abortion. However, you might want to tell them. Your parents could surprise you and face up to your decision to have an abortion. They might help you out, especially financially. If you have a good relationship with your parents, you might feel a lot better telling them you want or you've had an abortion.

"My father is an educator, and he would've wanted me to have the abortion so I could continue school. My mother is strict about her religion, and would have said, 'No way.' I didn't tell them, because it would have caused a fight between them."

"My mother know's now, but she never talks about it."

"He (my father) wanted me to have an abortion because, 'What would the neighbors think.' "

"My little brother, he was down the cellar, he goes 'Cathy, look at these pictures.' He had one of those Time-life magazines."

They had this magazine, that had pictures of an abortion and what a baby looks like, and it was really gross. I'm looking at this picture of what a baby looks like at three months, and I got wicked f___ed up and I started crying."

"My father found out about my abortion when my sister sent him the bill."

"My parents didn't know, because I wasn't living home at the time."

"We got two bathrooms. I use to go downstairs and hide in one and throw up there. It was a good set up. No one knew."

"I told my parents I was going camping. I told them I had two days vacation and I'd be back Wednesday or Thursday. My mother is 56 and my father is 57, and they're Catholic. That (the abortion) wouldn't go over big at all."

You will probably worry a lot about what your friends will think. Some of your friends will be critical, some will help you out, and some will try to influence you. You may even lose some friends, but these will be the ones that don't understand the situation your in. All you should worry about is what you want, and how you feel.

"She (my friend) plans on marrying her boyfriend. So, she said, 'If it was her she would have kept it.' But I thought different, I'm not ready to get married or have a kid."

"My girlfriend came, but she started to cry, so I asked her to leave, because I didn't need the extra emotional strain."

"I met a girl in my driver's ed class, and she told me about a doctor she went to to have an abortion. She was about the only person I talked to about it."

"My friends thought it was a good idea."

"I told all my friends."

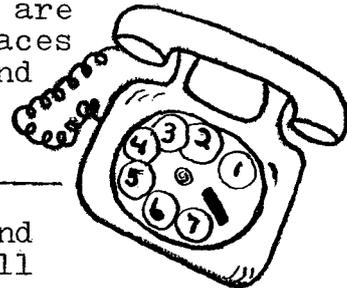
"My friend thought I did the right thing."

If your decision is to have an abortion, depending on how far along you are, there are three kinds of abortion generally available to you: Suction, D & C, and Saline.

Vacuum Aspiration Abortion (Suction)

This method is usually used in most abortion clinics and doctor's offices. You can use this method when you are 6-12 weeks pregnant.

Once you have decided to have an abortion, the next step is to make an appointment. Most appointments are made over the phone. You can find the names of places from agencies, your doctor, ads in the newspaper and also The Planned Parenthood League of your state.



"At the clinic they made me feel at ease. And what surprised me was they took women from all walks of life. They accepted people from the streets, to the people in mink coats."

When you do arrive at the clinic or the doctor's office, it is absolutely necessary for the doctor to know your full medical history. Certain medical problems might make it dangerous to do the abortion in an office or clinic. Some of the things that could be dangerous are:

1. Asthma- breathing problem
2. Drug Addiction- hooked on drugs
3. Allergies to any kind of drugs such as an anti-biotic like penicillin.
4. Severe Infections such as V.D. or pneumonia.
5. Previous Abortion or Pregnancy.

If you have or have had any of these things within the last six months, tell the doctor. Also, tell the doctor if you have had a bad reaction to an anesthesia (for example, a bad reaction to novocaine at the dentist). If you have these problems, it doesn't mean you can't have an abortion. But it might be necessary to have the abortion done in the hospital.

You are given a form to fill out on your medical history. Your blood pressure, and samples of your blood and urine are taken. These tests re-check that you are pregnant. You are also checked for V.D. and to find out your blood type.

Most abortion clinics have counseling for a woman before she has her abortion. Usually a counselor at the clinic will talk to you along with three to six other women who are also having an abortion.

"I didn't bother to ask about the procedure, because I was a little stupid, and I was upset."

"You also go to counseling. They show you a uterus, to explain what they do. They take a blood test too."

"I talked to two counselors with six other girls in a small room. Before my abortion, I talked to another lady for about a half an hour."

You will be shown through diagrams, pictures, and models of the vagina and uterus how the abortion is done. If you don't know what is going to happen, it might be a scary experience. The woman who counsels you will tell you about different birth control methods. Counseling is an important part of the abortion procedure, because most women want to know what will happen to them and how they might feel.

It is also nice to have somebody (a boyfriend, friend or relative) waiting with you to help you home, since after the abortion you are usually weak. Some clinics will let your friend or relative go with you through the abortion procedure.

Then you will be introduced to your own counselor. She'll discuss how you feel about having the abortion, or anything else you would like to talk about. It's nice to have a woman to talk to about abortion because she may know how you feel or it could have happened to her. She will also be with you while your abortion is being done.

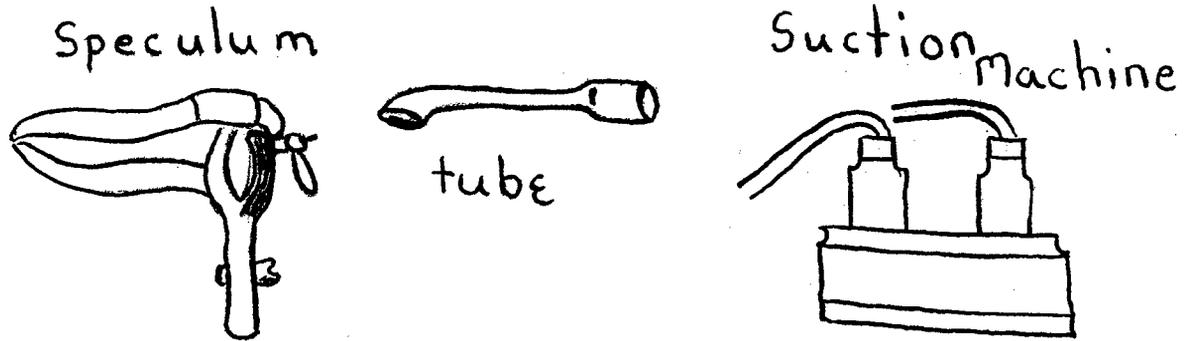
"The doctor didn't ask me how I felt. It was his nurse that really helped me alot. She stayed there and held my hand."

The Procedure

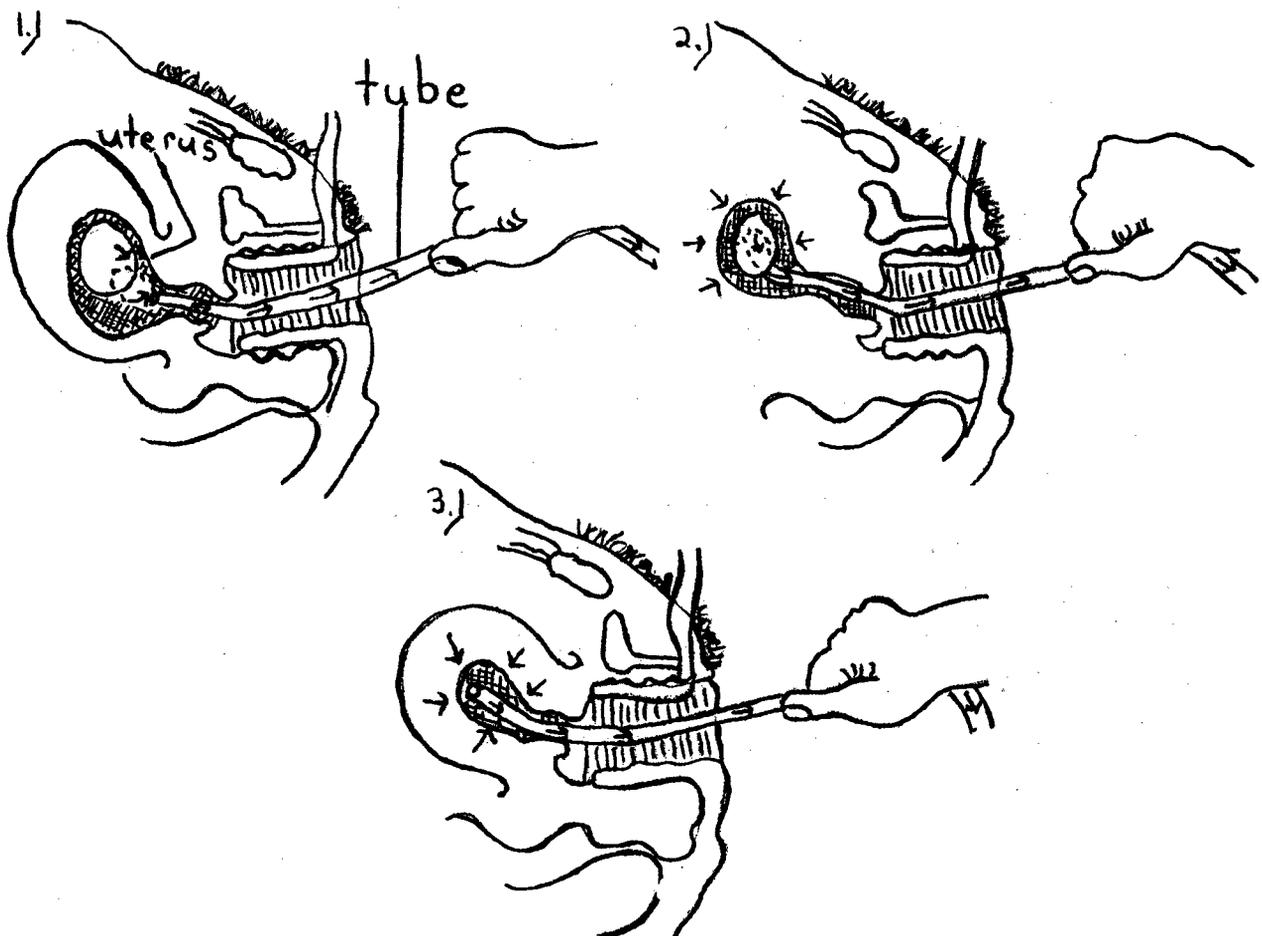
It is best not to eat anything for about eight hours before your appointment. This is to keep you from throwing up during the abortion. Different clinics have different ideas on this, so ask them what to do when you call them.

Your blood pressure is taken before and after the abortion. A change after the abortion would tell you of possible bleeding inside your body which could happen if the uterus has been damaged in any way. (This is unlikely since most good doctors are very careful of this.)

This is how the abortion is done. You lie down on an examining table with your feet in stirrups or your legs in knee pads. The abortion is done under local anesthesia. You are awake, but your cervix (the lower end of your uterus) is numbed. The doctor then puts in a speculum to open the vaginal walls so that s/he can get to the uterus. The cervix is opened up until a tube (which is like a long straw) can be passed through to the uterus. The tube is attached to a suction machine, which is similar to a vacuum cleaner.



The fetal material is then removed by a gentle suction of the uterine walls (the walls of your uterus or womb). The lining is passed through the tube and into a container which is attached to the machine.



"I expected to see a fetus, but after it went through suction, it didn't look like anything."

"They used a vacuum, and after I asked to see it. It looked like roast beef. I didn't touch Barbeque-beef for a long time."

"I didn't ask if it was a boy or a girl. But even if I did, they probably couldn't tell. But at twelve weeks maybe they could have."

While it is being done your counselor will tell you to breathe deeply, so that you will be more comfortable. The pain is just like cramps when you have your period. Some women have cramps worse than others. Ten to fifteen minutes is all it takes for this type of abortion.

"I don't know what kind of abortion I had, but I know they gave me two big syringes full of medication, like a novocaine. I could've used five more, because I could feel the scraping."

"It was the speculum that hurt the most. The abortion didn't."

"There was some pain, but it was just like they said it would be."

"It really hurt. I mean it F---ing hurt so bad. I felt so much pain. They told me it wouldn't hurt, and they're liars. It felt like my stomach was being kicked in. It was a really terrible feeling."

"It wasn't any worse than having cramps and I had the abortion in the doctor's office."

"I was tense. Don't ever be tense, because you'll feel it twice as much."

After it is over you will be taken to a recovery room. There will be other women who have also just had their abortions. Nurses or aides are there to help you if you need it. You will then be given some instruction on how to take care of yourself after the abortion.

1. Do not use tampons or tampex.
2. No sex.
3. No tub baths.

4. No douching--this is cleaning out the vaginal area, by spraying water up into the vagina.

These precautions are to prevent infections. You should not do any of these things for at least two weeks, because germs could get into your uterus. Some clinics or doctors give you a perscription for antibiotics just in case of infection. Also you may be given ergotrate- a pill to contract your uterus back to it's normal size.

"Physically, my legs felt like foam rubber."

It is normal to have cramps and light bleeding for several days after your abortion. You may also feel more tired than usual. Your body has just gone through a lot of changes very quickly and so it will take it a while to recuperate. Your body will return quickly to how it was before you were pregnant. You should have a period in four to eight weeks. If not, call your doctor. Two weeks after your abortion, you should have a check up, either at the clinic or with your own doctor.

"I was at the clinic for about four hours, and in the examining room for fifteen minutes."

Possible Complications:

The chances of problems from the vacuum aspirator abortion are very low. However sometimes infection occurs in your uterus after an abortion. Some signs of infection are: severe pain (such as cramps), heavy bleeding, and high fever.

The wall of your uterus may get peirced or poked during the procedure of the abortion. This can cause hemorrhaging. If this does happen you will start to bleed heavily. You should get to a doctor immediately.

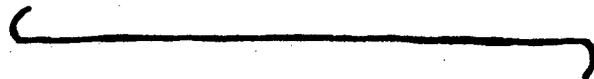
Another complication is an incomplete abortion; The doctor may not remove all the fetal material, which is the lining of your uterus. If this happens the woman will have to go into the hospital for a D&C. A D&C is a scraping of the walls of the uterus, to finish the abortion.

If you have smelly discharge, throwing up, and cramping, get to the doctor or clinic right away.

This commonly used method of abortion is generally available. Most areas of the country have places that will perform vacuum suction abortion.

The cost of this type of abortion is about \$150.00 but ranges from \$80-90 dollars at a Planned Parenthood Clinic. If the abortion is done by a private doctor in a hospital, it could cost \$250.00 or more. Sometimes you can arrange special payment plans, or lower plans by talking to the doctor or director of the abortion clinic. Don't hesitate to ask for a special payment plan if you don't have much money.

\$\$\$ money



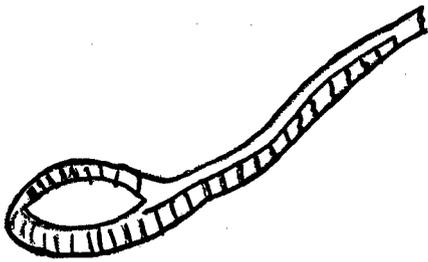
Dilation and Curettage (D & C)

This type of abortion is done from 12 to 14 weeks and sometimes up to 15 weeks. After 15 weeks, your uterus is too big and too soft for a suction or D & C abortion to be done safely. You have to wait until you are farther along so that a saline abortion can be done. (See section on Saline Abortion.)

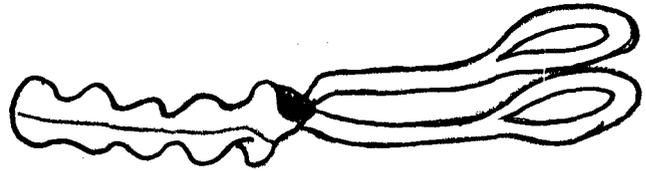
Almost all D & C's are done in a hospital under general anesthesia. There is usually little counseling or support done around D & C's so you might want to have a friend or relative with you before and after the abortion is done.

The procedure;

The method is very similar to the suction abortion. The cervix is stretched open. Instead of a suction tube, the doctor uses a metal loop on the end of a long handle to scrape the womb. This is used to loosen the lining of the uterus. The fetal tissue is removed with forceps. Forceps look like a pair of big tweezers.



curette



Forceps

The same problems can occur after a D & C as can occur with a suction abortion, so you should follow the same precautions. You should watch for any symptoms of infection or hemorrhaging. (See Suction Abortion section.)

A D & C usually costs more than a suction abortion: \$250.00 or more depending on the doctor.

Saline Abortion

This method of abortion is done from sixteen weeks and over. It is mainly done in the hospital, or in clinics with bloodbanks and proper facilities for surgery.

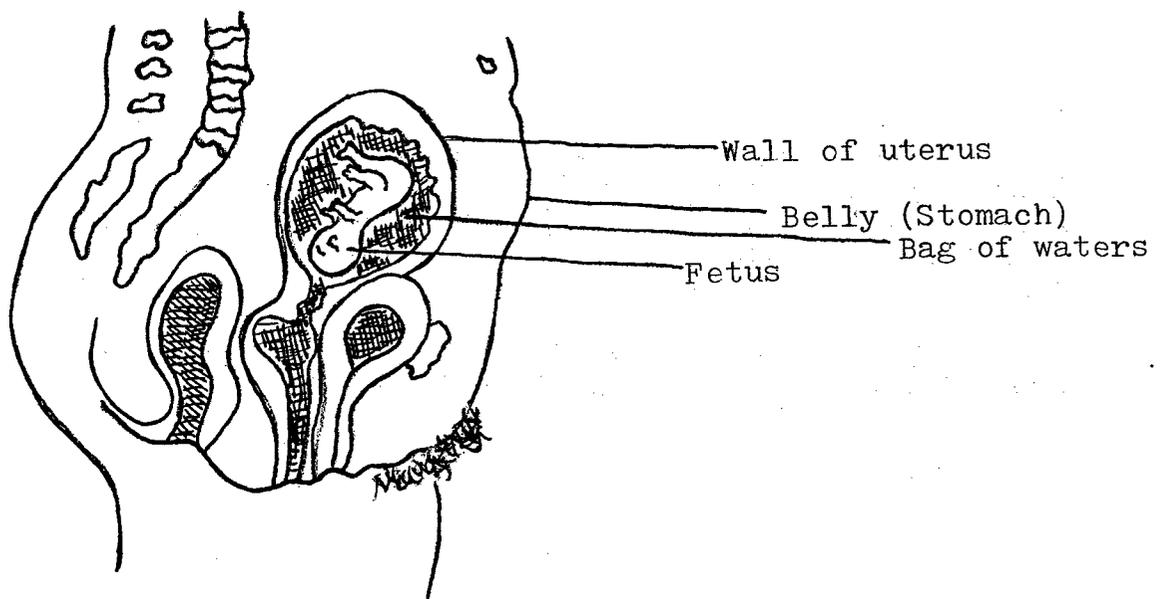
The first thing done is a pelvic examination. The doctor must have a full medical history before doing the abortion. You should have special care if you have a history of the following:

1. Severe heart disease.
2. Severe kidney disease.
3. Asthma - breathing problems.
4. Diabetes - lack of insulin.
5. High blood pressure - circulatory disease.

A blood and urine sample are taken. These samples are taken to find out your blood type and to obtain information on your general health. The doctor needs to know your blood type because this could be important in terms of good health in future pregnancies.

The Procedure

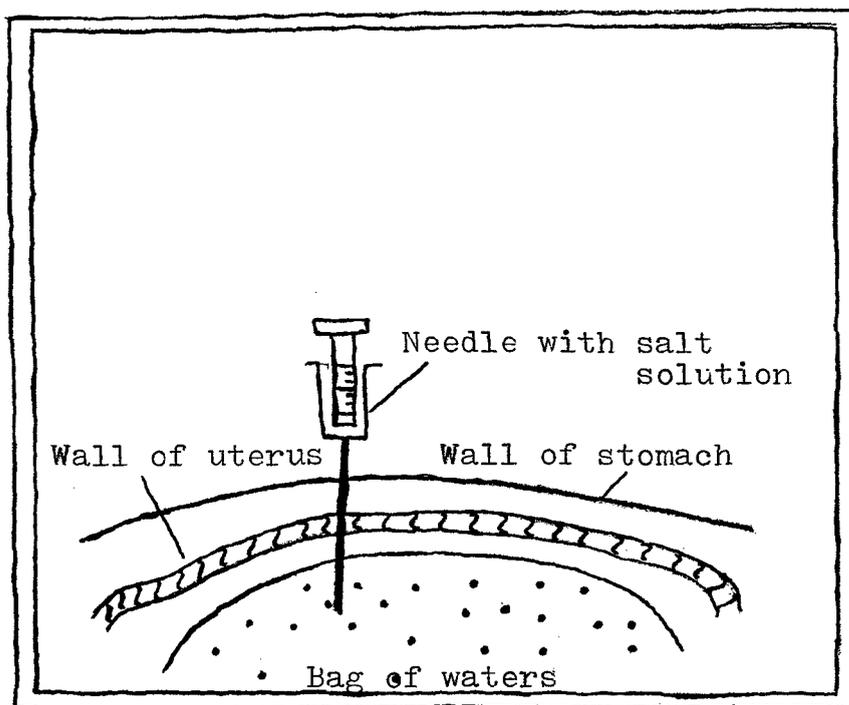
The saline abortion is basically a miscarriage that is made to happen. A doctor injects a strong salt solution into the bag of waters that surrounds the baby or fetus. This solution causes a miscarriage usually within twenty-four to twenty-eight hours.



Woman at 16 weeks pregnant

When the pregnant woman becomes sixteen weeks pregnant her bag of waters is large enough for the doctor to inject a needle from the outside into the area of her stomach. The needle is about six inches long, and feels more like pressure than pain. The area below the naval is numbed before the needle is injected into the bag of waters.

"That first needle, that novocaine needle, hurt like hell -- the one that goes in your stomach. Then after that, you don't feel anything."



The fluid from the bag of waters is drawn out through the needle. This fluid is colorless. You may feel as though you are emptying out, but no pain is involved. Next the doctor puts in a salt (saline) solution through the same tube. This takes ten minutes. You may feel bloated. You should tell the nurse and the doctor if you have any symptoms such as cold hands and feet, dizziness, cramps, lower back pain, headache, or dryness.

All these are danger signs. Your blood pressure should be taken periodically to find out how your body is reacting to the salt.

"There were nurses there every ten minutes in and out of the room making sure that everything was O.K."

After the salt solution is put into your body, you should relax while waiting for the second stage of the abortion to begin. This stage is labor. (See pregnancy section for description of labor.) At this time you may be very thirsty and should drink liquids, but none with salt (for example, tomato juice or soda). All carbonated beverages have salt in them.

The salt solution that the doctor puts in you makes your bag of waters swell. You may start having contractions or pains anytime within five to fifty hours. You may put your hands on your stomach and feel it becoming hard. In the beginning the pains may feel like menstrual cramps, but they become stronger and closer together. These pains open the cervix. There may be a gush of fluids, which means the bag of waters has broken. You will know when the fetus is ready to come out, because you will feel like pushing (like a bowel movement). Some women have pain after the fetus is expelled. These pains are similar to those of afterbirth.

"I had the shot at 10:00 in the morning, and I didn't abort until 12:02 that night. I had cramps right up until 11:00 and then the pains came, and they were pretty bad. Then the membranes broke. Then the baby came, and then came the afterbirth. Right after, it doesn't hurt either."

After the fetus and the afterbirth have been expelled, you will usually be hospitalized for twenty-four hours. Sometimes you may be given antibiotics and medication to shrink the size of your uterus back to normal. If you notice any bleeding or infection you should contact your doctor immediately. You should observe the same safety measures as with the suction abortion for two weeks. (See section on vacuum abortion.) You should also have a check up in two weeks.

"I felt great. I ate right after. I got bigger. Then I got smaller again. I wish I could keep them (my breasts) that size. They started getting smaller right after the abortion. They give you a shot to dry up the milk which doesn't work. I learned when I started leaking out of my shirts. It only happened a couple of times then that was it. You bleed for two weeks to a month after."

The cost of this kind of abortion ranges from \$350.00 to \$750.00 or more depending on the hospital.

"I was never in the hospital before. I didn't know if I was allergic to any medications or not. I was taking a lot of chances just doing it. But, shit, if I was going to have it (the baby) and I was in the hospital, I could of died there too, having it."

CONCLUSION

No matter what, being under eighteen and becoming pregnant is going to be a heavy experience, whether you keep the baby, give it up, or have an abortion. From what we've learned, it seems like the best thing to do is to avoid getting pregnant. Therefore, we suggest using a method of birth control or waiting to have sex until you are older and are in a situation better suited to deal with pregnancy.

"I didn't think of taking birth control. I guess most people think young kids don't do that sort of thing."

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