



PREGNANCY OPTIONS

SOUTH SHORE
SEXUAL HEALTH




This booklet was created by
Julie Veinot, Sexual Health Centre Lunenburg County, 2019. Revised 2023.

Many thanks to the expertise of people working in the field who helped us research and review this document. Any errors are not theirs, but the author's. Thank you for help on such a stigmatized subject.

Remember to check with your own health care provider about medical information specific to your own body.

Photographs: Dreamstime and Canva

www.southshoresexualhealth.com



THIS BOOK IS DESIGNED

for folks needing to know their pregnancy options. Maybe you must make a decision. Maybe your partner needs help making a decision. Maybe you're supporting someone with an unplanned or unintended pregnancy.

We hope this resource offers you information about pregnancy options as well as how to access them here in Nova Scotia.

If any time you feel overwhelmed, seek support from a trusted source or a sexual health centre.

We are here to help you with pro-choice, non-judgmental support, whether you are straight or 2SLGBTQAIP*.

AM I EVEN PREGNANT?

Anyone can become pregnant unexpectedly due to a broken condom, sexual assault, or by taking a medicine that interferes with hormonal birth control.

A common sign of pregnancy is a missed period. Other signs of pregnancy may include:

- nausea or throwing up
- being tired or needing extra sleep
- peeing more often
- changes in vaginal discharge
- light bleeding or spotting
- tender breasts
- other unusual symptoms

The only way to find out if you are pregnant is to take a pregnancy test, then visit your doctor or nurse practitioner. They will confirm if you are pregnant. They may also date your pregnancy.

You can buy a pregnancy test at any drug store or get a free one from your doctor or sexual health centre.

It can be difficult to make a decision. But the sooner you do, the sooner you can access all options.

WHERE TO START?

Let's look at all three options in alphabetical order.

1

Abortion is a procedure to end a pregnancy.

2

Adoption means carrying the pregnancy to term and allowing someone else to raise the child.

3

Finally, **parenting** means you raise the child yourself.

No option works for everybody.

If you are the person who is pregnant, no one can tell you what to do with your body except yourself.

This booklet will help you explore what option works for you and how to access it.

ASK YOURSELF

Only you know the true answers to these questions. They may help you make a decision you can live with.

How do you feel about being pregnant at this point in your life?

What are your OWN beliefs about adoption, abortion, and parenting?

Are you ready to be a parent now? Alone or with a partner?

If you continue the pregnancy, are you able to take care of your health and seek out prenatal care?

Would you be OK with placing a child up for adoption after carrying the pregnancy to term?

Would you be OK with having an abortion?

What support (emotional and financial) do you have?

What are your future plans? How does your choice affect your plans?

What can you live with?

ABORTION

There are two types of abortion available in Nova Scotia: surgical and medical.

Medical abortions are done early in pregnancy, usually in the first 9 weeks since your last menstrual period.

Pills stop the pregnancy from continuing, and help it leave your body, similar to a miscarriage. Some people prefer having their abortion in a private space of their choice.

You generally need an ultrasound and bloodwork before a doctor will prescribe the medical abortion pills. Any drug store will fill the prescription for free if you have your Nova Scotia health card with you. Afterwards, you need more blood work to ensure you are no longer pregnant. If you are still pregnant, you will need a procedure called a D&C. The medications for a medical abortion can cause damage to the fetus. **A "abortion pill reversal" is not possible, so you must be sure you wish to have a medical abortion before you start the pills.**

Common side effects include pain, heavy bleeding, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, chills, headaches, and fatigue. If you do not wish to deal with these side effects, you may want to consider a surgical abortion.

Elective surgical abortions take place in hospitals or clinics. There are no private clinics in Nova Scotia that do surgical abortions, but gynecologists will do them at larger hospitals including South Shore Regional Hospital. There is also a unit in Halifax called the Nova Scotia Choice Clinic. It is at the Victoria General Hospital.

Generally, surgical abortions are done when someone is between 8 weeks and 15 weeks and 5 days. Ask your health care provider for specific dates because they do vary.

Surgical abortions are free for people with a Nova Scotia health card.

Some doctors put you to sleep (general anesthetic) while others keep you awake. If you are awake, they can give you painkillers and/or something to help you relax. Each provider has a slightly different procedure, so be sure to ask for details as well as after care.

The first step to getting a surgical abortion is to book an appointment with a health care provider to confirm your pregnancy and get a referral for an abortion. You can also call the hotline number (see below).

You can be referred to a gynecologist who performs elective abortions in your area. You can also be referred to the Choice Clinic in Halifax. You can also refer yourself.

You need a referral for an ultrasound and bloodwork before having a surgical abortion. The Choice Clinic can arrange that in your local community, even if you have the procedure done in Halifax. Call the Choice Clinic toll free at 1.833.352.0719.

How does a surgical procedure work?

You will either be put asleep by anesthetic, or remain awake. You have the option of taking a painkiller and anti-anxiety drug if you stay awake for the procedure.

Different health care providers use a few different techniques during the abortion itself. Something must dilate, or open, the cervix to allow the doctor access to your uterus. If you are awake, they will use local anesthetic to numb the cervix.

Early abortions are done by suctioning and removing tissue from the uterus. When you are done, you will return to the recovery room until you feel good enough to leave.

You will not be able to drive afterwards and will need a support person to drive you home. The Choice Clinic needs contact information for them and they will confirm the person's availability. The support person cannot wait on the unit, but there are social workers available for support. Your drive will be called about 30 minutes before your hospital discharge.

If you are concerned about pain, talk to your health care provider about medicine to relieve relieve pain or cramping. You will need to wear a pad because you will have light bleeding for up to a few weeks.

Talk to your health care provider about how soon you can resume work, sex, and contraception. If your contraception failed, this may be a good time to talk about birth control that will reduce your chances of getting pregnant again.

Afterwards, many people feel relief. However, many feelings after an abortion are perfectly normal.

AFTER CARE TO DO LIST

Take time to rest and heal. Do what you need to do to feel well... healthy food, more rest.

Give yourself permission to feel any emotion after an abortion. Some moods may simply be your body returning to its non-pregnant state.

If you find it difficult to work through your emotions, talk to a mental health professional or community counsellor. Local women centres can be a great resource for supportive counselling and listening. Sexual Health Nova Scotia member-centres also can listen. The Choice Clinic has social workers who can chat with you.

Do something that makes you feel better, whether it's gardening, walking, photography, or napping.

**NO DRIVE FROM THE TERMINATION OF
PREGNANCY UNIT?
VOLUNTEERS CAN HELP.**

WHAT TO EXPECT

You may bleed up to a few weeks after the procedure. Some people do not bleed until a few days after the abortion. Some people bleed one to three weeks. Some people barely bleed at all. Be prepared with some soft pads and light painkillers for any cramping.

Avoid tampons and vaginal penetration for as long as your doctor tells you. For 24 hours, do not drive, sign anything important, do anything strenuous, or drink alcohol.

If you experience heavy bleeding after a surgical abortion or a high fever, contact medical help. With a medical abortion, ask for help if you soak more than two large pads an hour for two hours in a row. Seek help if you feel dizzy, have a fast heartbeat, or get bad smelling vaginal discharge.

Some people may notice a light milky discharge from their nipples. This will go away on its own in a few weeks. Do not force or express the fluid from your nipples.

Many people will notice their morning sickness disappearing after a day or so. Breast tenderness goes away in about a week.

After an abortion, you will be able to get pregnant again quite quickly.

If you are unable to find someone to connect with you, and need to sort out your thoughts, feel free to contact any of Sexual Health Nova Scotia's member-centres, your local women's centre, or by calling 1.888.493.0092. This number is based in California, but offers support to people across North America. Please note they have limited hours, which you can see by visiting yourbackline.org.



RESOURCES

Nova Scotia Choice Clinic (Halifax)

1.833.352.0719

You do not need a referral to the clinic. They can help you get a medical or surgical abortion. They can also help arrange for the ultrasound and bloodwork you need to get an abortion.

Halifax Sexual Health Centre

<http://www.hshc.ca>

902.455.9656

A free pro-choice, LGBTQ2S inclusive, youth-friendly organization offering STI testing and treatment, birth control counselling and prescriptions, HPV vaccines, Pap tests, prostate and testicular exams, pre-natal referrals, abortion counselling and referrals, adoption referrals.

Abortion Support Services Atlantic

Email assa.coordinator@gmail.com

ASSA offers support services for anyone. They can also help arrange a drive or accompaniment if you need it. Email for complete services.

**ASK IF THE SERVICE YOU ARE USING
IS PRO CHOICE.**

**SOME PREGNANCY CENTRES
MAY OFFER YOU MISINFORMATION ABOUT
YOUR CHOICES.**

ADOPTION

Adoption means you carry your pregnancy to term, then give up the child and allow someone else to raise them.

In Nova Scotia, you can go through a private agency, lawyer, or through the Department of Community Services.

There is some flexibility in the adoption process. You may have relatives who wish to adopt the child. You may want Community Services to choose a suitable family.

You may want the child to know who you are. You may want a closed adoption.

You can choose the option of adoption early in your pregnancy, or wait until after childbirth. You can change your mind until you sign legal papers. There may even be a small period in which you are able to change your mind. However, once this is over, the adoption is final.

Potential parents must be over 19 years old, residents of Nova Scotia, be Canadian citizens or have permanent resident status. However, they may be single or in a couple, same sex, or in a common law relationship. Any parent, including relatives, must be approved before the adoption takes place.

For more information on adoption, talk to Community Services.



Can I choose a family in another province?

Each province has different regulations, so it may be more complex. If you know of someone in another province who wishes to adopt the baby, talk to someone at Community Services or a lawyer as soon as possible.

I can't afford a lawyer. Does this mean I have to go through Community Services?

Not necessarily. You may be eligible for Legal Aid. Book an appointment with Legal Aid to find out.

Can I do the adoption anonymously? Or do I have to be contacted if the child wishes to see me?

There is an Adoption Registry that keeps all of the information about the people who are involved. However, private, identifying information like names will only be released with the consent, or permission, of both sides. Keep in mind this does not hold true if one of the people has died. The information can then be released.

What if I want the child to contact me?

The child has the option to apply for information about their adoption once they are 19 and older, unless they have the permission of their adoptive parents.

What if someone needs a medical history?

Some non-identifying information can be released without identifying information. Non-identifying information may include medical history, physical description, interests and level of education.

RESOURCES

Nova Scotia Adoption Information Line

1.866.259.7780

Call for more information on adoption regulations in Nova Scotia.

Backline

1.888.493.0092.

Although based in California, this free line offers support about pregnancy options including adoption.

Legal Aid

Look in the phone book or online to get the number of your nearest Legal Aid office. They are in many large communities.

Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia

1.800.665.9779

legalinfo.org

This organization offers great resources directly on their website. You can also call them for information or to refer you to a lawyer.

**THE BEST DECISION IS THE ONE THAT
WORKS FOR YOU... FOR YOUR LIFE, YOUR
VALUES, AND YOUR HEALTH.**

PARENTING

Some people when faced with an unplanned pregnancy feel that the best option for them is to become parents or to have another child.

Parenting is a lifelong commitment. It is full of challenges and joys. While it is a long-term option, you may feel it is the best choice for you.

Now may be a good time to look at your resources to see if you can afford to raise a child. If you have no income, Income Assistance may be an option.

If you work, you may want to look into childcare ahead of time. It can be difficult to find childcare in rural Nova Scotia and many daycare centres do not take children under a certain age. Given the wait times for some services, ask about childcare as soon as possible.

If you are in a relationship, find out if your partner is willing to help raise the child. If the relationship is already stormy, adding a child may make it worse or end it. However, if the relationship is strong, parenting may create a new bond.

Parenting can be hard, but not impossible. Think about whether parenting is right for you and your well-being, along with that of the future child.

PREGNANCY

Should you decide to continue with the pregnancy, you can get support from a variety of places, along with free prenatal care so you have as healthy a pregnancy as possible.

If you haven't already confirmed your pregnancy, make an appointment with your health care provider. People without a doctor or nurse practitioner can visit a walk-in clinic for more information, the Halifax Sexual Health Centre, or contact their local hospital for information on how to access prenatal care. You can also contact your local sexual health centre for referral information.

Prenatal care will screen you for infections and things that could complicate your pregnancy, like diabetes and high blood pressure.

You will also be able to ask if you should continue any prescriptions.

If you take any illegal drugs, smoke, or drink alcohol, now is probably a good time to look at cutting these substances from your life. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are caused when the fetus is exposed to alcohol. Don't be afraid to ask for support and mental health services if you need them.

Do your best to maintain as healthy a lifestyle as possible in your own unique circumstances.

Remember that no human is perfect. Try your best to live as well as you can with your resources.

Growing a fetus is hard work. If you continue with your pregnancy, you can expect different symptoms throughout the many stages of your pregnancy. Keep in contact with a health care professional and seek out great sources of information. This could be your local library or sexual health centre.

Finally, remember that everyone has an opinion about pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting. And everyone is likely to share it with you.

You are doing the best you can with what you have.



CONSIDER...

Am I physically and emotionally ready
to carry a pregnancy to term and deliver the child?

Do I feel ready to take on the tasks of parenting?

Do I feel too young or too old to have a baby?

Is my relationship ready to become a parenting partnership?

What resources do I have to help me raise the child? This
include money, family and friends, energy.

If I become a single parent,
will I be able to raise this child on my own?

Will my own health and well-being suffer
if I have a child and become a parent?

If I already have children, what will another child
mean for their lives?

What do I hope to achieve in the next year, 5 years, 10 years?
How will this affect that?

What decision can I live with?

RESOURCES

Family Resource Centres

Many communities have family resource centres, which can be a great source of prenatal support, parenting support, and programming that often comes with free childcare.

Women's Resource Centres

There is probably a women's centre near you, offering everything from free programming to supportive counselling. Stop by or call to see what your local centre can offer you.

Midwives

Some communities have midwives, which offer you the opportunity to deliver in hospital or at home if you have a low risk pregnancy. Not all places have midwives, but ask your health provider if this is an option.

Public Health

Contact your local public health office to see if they can help you. They have extra programs for some parents.

Transition Houses

If you are in an abusive relationship, talk to your local transition house. They may be able to offer you support and/or temporary housing.

Income Assistance

If you have no income and are unable to work, you may be eligible to receive Income Assistance.

LaLeche League

LaLache offers those who breastfeed support and information.



FOR SUPPORTERS

If you are reading this book because a partner or loved one is facing an unplanned pregnancy, this section is for you.

First, remember that the decision is ultimately that of the person who is pregnant. Do your best to support their decision, whether that means driving them to appointments or offering them space to talk.

Second, listen. Sometimes, people just need someone to listen to them sort their thoughts. Ask if they want advice before offering it. It can be hard to listen to someone having a difficult time without trying to help them fix it.

Here are some other tips:

- Ask what they need. No two people face this the same way.
- Be prepared for a whole range of emotions.
- If you are a sexual partner, remember to check in with your partner about what they need.

Finally, seek support for yourself. We cannot take care of others unless we take care of ourselves first. If you are the person's partner, you may need support yourself to sort out feelings about the pregnancy. Give yourself permission to feel whatever you need to feel.

A FINAL NOTE

We hope you have found this booklet a useful source of information.

One of the most important things you can do is find a great source of non-judgmental support. That might be a close friend, trusted family member, or even a professional from your local sexual health centre.

Ultimately, this decision belongs to the person who is pregnant. No friend or professional has the right to tell them what to do.

Listen to what feels right for you and your body.

CENTRES

Please feel free to contact any sexual health centre for detailed information about your options locally. We are non-judgmental and pro-choice. That means we believe you have the right and ability to make your own decision! We are also youth and 2SLGBTQAIP* friendly.

Halifax Sexual Health Centre

Halifax is the only sexual health centre able to offer frequent clinical services, including IUDs and abortion referrals.

7071 Bayers Rd, Suite 302

902.455.9656

HSHC.ca

Sheet Harbour Sexual Health Centre

Sheet Harbour offers links to a nurse practitioner, who can prescribe and refer for sexual health services.

Suite 216 22756 Highway 7

902.885.3693

sheetharbourshce@hotmail.com

Cape Breton Centre for Sexual Health

902.539.5158

pp.cb@bellaliant.com

Sexual Health Centre for Cumberland County

82 Church Street

902.667.7500

shccc@ns.aliantzinc.ca

<https://sexualhealthmatters.ca/>

South Shore Sexual Health

109 Logan Road, Bridgewater

902.527.2868

southshoresexualhealth@gmail.com

southshoresexualhealth.com