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## If you think you may be pregnant.

You may be worried immediately after sex if you realise your contraception has failed (i.e. if a condom has leaked or split), if you have missed a dose of your oral contraceptive, or because you do not feel the precautions you took gave you adequate protection.

Missing a period is the most obvious sign of pregnancy. However this can have other causes such as stress, worry, disordered eating or sudden strenuous exercise. Starting or finishing a course of oral contraceptives can also interfere with periods, while many women simply experience infrequent or irregular menstruation. Other features of pregnancy include breast tenderness, darkening of the nipples, nausea, vomiting, frequent urination, weight gain and backache.

If you are experiencing some of the latter but your periods have continued, there still may be a small chance that you are pregnant as some women experience spotting/light bleeding throughout pregnancy.

Even if you used a reliable method of contraception, you should think about doing a pregnancy test as soon as possible. Pregnancy can be confirmed almost immediately by a urine test, ideally one day after you should have had your period. Test kits can be bought from most chemists (they cost around £8-£15). Some Common Rooms will provide them for free, contact your welfare officer or women's officer. OUSU's VP (Women) can also provide them free, drop in to the OUSU building on Bonn Square, or email [women@ousu.org](mailto:women@ousu.org) if you would rather be pidgeoned. Alternatively, you can go to your GP, College Doctor or a sexual health/family planning clinic. Even if you got a negative result on a home test kit, if you still haven't had your period after a week it's best to either home test again or visit one of these health professionals.

### IMPORTANT:

If your condom has split or you did not use a barrier method of contraception you may still be at risk of sexually transmitted infections. It's important to seek medical advice if this is the case.

The 'Oxford GU Medicine' centre at the Churchill Hospital, Old Road, Headington is the NHS sexual health clinic in Oxford. The clinic gives free check-ups and tests and has a 'drop in' system, so you do not need to be referred by your GP. The mini-check clinic runs from 1:15pm -3:15pm, Monday to Friday. You can also speak to nurses and doctors over the phone (01865 741841).

If you feel a sudden, extremely intense, one side aching in your lower back and you think you might be at risk of pregnancy it is important to see a doctor. This could be a sign of an ectopic pregnancy (where the foetus develops in the fallopian tube) and if left untreated this could cause major health concerns.

## If you are definitely pregnant.

The main options are described below, and the contacts section suggests organisations to approach for more information and support.

Whatever your decision, it is important that you see your GP or a doctor at a sexual health clinic as soon as you know that you are pregnant.

Remember that the final decision is yours. You may find it helpful to talk to the prospective father if possible, and you may also want to discuss the situation with friends, family, doctors, religious leaders, or student advisers. Be aware that some organisations that claim to offer "free pregnancy testing and support" are directive anti-abortion groups that may try to influence your decision. All the counselling detailed in the Contacts section of this guide is completely impartial, and will respect whatever choice you make.

Here are some things, which might be helpful to consider while making your decision:

- Your initial feelings on being pregnant/ gut reaction/ how you feel now
- Whether you are in a relationship now, and what that relationship is like
- Whether you want to have a child in this relationship/how you feel about having a child not in a relationship
- Your support from friends and family (practically, emotionally, perhaps financially)
- Your feelings about abortion and adoption (how you think you'd feel afterwards)

Whatever you decide, make sure:

- You have support, someone to talk to
- You have thought ahead
- That it's your decision

If you decide to continue with a pregnancy, whether or not you ultimately intend to keep the child, you should see your GP as soon as possible in order to start pre-natal care and ensure a healthy pregnancy. She/he will advise you on diet, exercise, and check-ups and generally guide you in preparing for the birth, and can also put you in contact with a midwife to advise you on breast-feeding, baby care and other issues.

## Taking time off from your studies.

Whatever you decide, you may feel that you want or need to take time out from your studies and arrange to return at a later date. In this case you should contact your college: your personal tutor or senior tutor. The process for taking time out from your degree will differ from college to college. In some instances it may be a case of having the approval of your tutor and senior tutor, while in others you may have to go through a more formalised process.

If you take time off, it is likely that you will be required to take a whole year out. This will vary depending on your subject and your college. Some colleges will be more amenable to allowing people to catch up on missed work, while others will make you re-do the entire year. However, the decision about when you chose to take this time off should be entirely up to you. You are not required to drop-out of your studies as soon as you find out you are pregnant, but your moral/ personal tutor, or senior tutor may be able to advise you on the best course of action with regards to your degree during this period.

Some people prefer to take two or more years out due to pregnancy. In such instances it is not guaranteed that college will accept your case for an extended intermission, although most will be sympathetic to issues relating to pregnancy. OUSU's VP (Women) and VP (Access and Academic Affairs) are available to help you negotiate with tutors.

If you do take an extended period out of your degree, you may be 'overstanding for honours'. This simply means that you will have to get permission from the university in order to carry on with your degree past the set number of terms that is allocated. The process is a simple one, and your senior tutor should be able to help you with this. If you have any problems or want to know more about the process contact OUSU's Student Advice Service.

If you are a graduate, taking time out of your degree requires 'suspending status'. The easiest way to do this is to talk to your supervisor or the director of graduate studies of your department. They should help you through the application process, which involves requesting to suspend status from the Proctors. Once this has been approved, your college will then be informed. Usually you can suspend status for up to 6 terms, although there is an appeal process to request more time.

You probably won't qualify for income support or job seeker's allowance if you decide to take time out of University then return later. Unfortunately you are also ineligible for student support or student loans. Once you've had your baby you may be eligible for some benefits, such as job seeker's allowance, income support, family credit, a maternity payment, housing benefit, council tax benefit, free milk and vitamins and help with hospital fares. You will also be entitled to child benefit and free prescriptions and dental treatment for children aged under 16 and for yourself for twelve months after the birth. You can find out more information about your specific circumstances by calling the Job Centre on 01865 445000.

## Continuing the pregnancy.

Deciding to keep the child and raise it yourself is a decision with many implications for your studies and your future. Being a parent is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences that any person can experience, but it is not easy, especially whilst studying.

### **What will the Government/ the University/ my college provide to help?**

**Government:** having a baby does not affect your student loan or Higher Education Grant, if you have one. The Government do fund the Parents' Learning Allowance and the Childcare Grant, for UK undergraduates only. Contact your Local Education Authority or the Department for Education and Skills (see Contacts). All UK students, graduate and undergraduate, can also apply to the Access to Learning Fund; your college can help you handle this. You may also be eligible for Child Tax Credits from the Inland Revenue (see Contacts).

**University:** graduate and undergraduate students will also be entitled to the University Hardship Grant. The Emergency Childcare Fund is also available for overseas students who have had their baby recently. The University has some housing for graduate students with families.

**Colleges:** some colleges provide accommodation for student parents, although this varies greatly from college to college. Talk to your MCR/JCR Housing Officer, a college staff member in charge of accommodation or the university Accommodation Office.

For more information about being a student parent, please contact the VP (Women) at OUSU for a copy of the Student Parent Handbook or read it on the OUSU website ([www.ousu.org](http://www.ousu.org)).

It is of course possible for you to keep the baby and give up your studies entirely, but this carries its own problems.

## Adoption.

You may not wish to terminate a pregnancy, and yet not wish to be a parent; in this case adoption is an option for you. Adoption ends the legal relationship between the child and the birth parents, and establishes a new one with the adoptive parents. Adoptions are arranged by adoption agencies but are made legally binding by the courts. Once granted, an adoption order is final and cannot be revoked.

Adoptions are arranged by local authority social services departments and by voluntary agencies. Although preparations for the adoption can begin before your child is born, nothing will be definitely arranged until after the birth.

Talking about what an adoption involves, both practically and emotionally, could be helpful – it is a good idea to seek support to reach a decision with which you will be happy in years to come. You can get expert advice from social workers in the social services department of Oxfordshire County Council, from a voluntary adoption agency or hospital social workers who work with maternity clinics.

### **What will happen if I choose adoption?**

If you decide that adoption is right for your baby, the social worker at the agency that is handling the adoption will spend some time with you to help you with your decision. You will need to give some personal information about yourself, your family and your family's health for the adopters to be able to share with the child as she/ he grows up.

When you leave hospital after the birth your baby may be looked after by a temporary foster carer or may possibly go straight to his or her adoptive parents. Your social worker will have discussed this and agreed with you the best plan. Your social worker will make regular visits to the child to check everything is going well and offer support.

When the baby has settled down with his or her adoptive parents, they will make an application to the court. The court will then arrange for you to be visited by someone who will make sure that you understand what adoption involves. You will be asked to sign a formal document. You cannot give this formal agreement until the baby is at least six weeks old.

The agency will have to provide a report to the court about how the child is settling in, and if the court is satisfied that all is well then an adoption order will be granted. This can't happen until the baby is at least 19 weeks old and has lived with the adopters for 13 weeks.

### **Open and Closed Adoptions**

There are now different approaches taken to adoption in the UK. In the past, the baby would be adopted anonymously, and contact would only be made with the birthmother once the child has reached 18. More recently, the concept of 'open adoption' has been developed- where the birth mother may be involved in the selection process of the child's new parents, and may have specifically agreed access to their child, for example the ability to exchange letters, photos and mementos, or meetings for occasions such as birthdays. The contact component of open adoption is not legally binding, so consider the implications of this carefully; make sure the families you consider for adopting share your opinions on the open process and are truly committed to making it work.

Different people will find open or closed options most attractive to them personally. It may be worth discussing the pros and cons to achieve the right choice for you.

## **Abortion (termination of pregnancy).**

If you are pregnant and are considering a termination it is best to seek advice as soon as possible. Your GP or a sexual health clinic will be able to advise you on your options. It is a difficult decision and you should not feel pressurised at all. In most circumstances you will have up to 24 weeks, although it is important to remember that the stage at which you have an abortion will affect the method of termination used, and statistics show that earlier abortions are safer. Doctors usually recommend having an abortion before 12 weeks in order to make the procedure as simple as possible.

Under UK abortion law, termination is legal up to the 24th week of pregnancy (pregnancy is dated from the first day of a the woman's last period). If there is a substantial risk to the woman's life or if there are foetal abnormalities, however, there is no time limit (see Late Abortions, below).

To comply with the 1967 Abortion Act, two doctors must give their consent, stating that to continue with the pregnancy would present a risk to the physical or mental health of the woman or her existing children. You will need to talk through your reasons for having a termination with a doctor. Some doctors have strong views against abortion and may refuse you consent, they are not obliged to disclose their objections and although they should recommend another doctor who can help you, not all do.

If you experience resistance to your choice, or if one doctor refuses to help you, you have the legal right to see another: try contacting a family planning centre. Be aware that some groups that offer "free pregnancy testing and support" are directive anti-abortion organisations which may try to influence your decision.

Occasionally, though not very often, a doctor may consider the pregnancy too advanced to allow an abortion to go ahead. If this is the case, you may have to fund the abortion yourself. Oxford however, is fortunate in that most abortions are carried out free on the NHS, compared to the national average.

If you decide to have an abortion it is important to contact your GP or Family Planning Clinic as soon as you are able.

### **Methods of abortion.**

*Up to 9 weeks – early medical abortion.*

This treatment does not require surgery. It consists of the drug RU486, sometimes called the abortion pill, which can be taken up to 63 days (9 weeks) after the first day of your last period. It involves two visits to hospital, the first to take the pills and the second, around two days later,

to take another pill orally or have small prostaglandin tablets inserted into your vagina. This causes contractions, which may feel like very strong period pains, and these cramps will expel the contents of the uterus. The abortion usually occurs within 4-6 hours, though you may bleed for up to two weeks.

#### *9–20 weeks – medical abortion*

This type of abortion uses the same drug as the earlier one, but in higher doses. The abortion at this stage is usually quick enough for you to return home the same day, but sometimes it is necessary to stay overnight, particularly when the abortion is carried out later in pregnancy.

#### *Up to ten weeks – manual vacuum aspiration (suction abortion)*

This involves a small tube being inserted into the vagina, through the cervix (entrance to the womb) and into the womb to remove the pregnancy by suction. To reduce any discomfort or pain during the abortion the doctor will inject a local anaesthetic into the cervix. Sometimes this injection can be painful. The procedure takes about 5–10 minutes. You will usually go home on the same day a few hours after the abortion has been carried out.

#### *Up to 15 weeks – vacuum aspiration*

This method is similar to the type above, but uses an electric pump. The abortion can be carried out using a local anaesthetic in the cervix or under a light general anaesthetic so you are asleep during the procedure. The procedure takes about ten minutes. You will usually go home on the same day a few hours after the abortion has been carried out.

#### *After 15 weeks – surgical dilatation and evacuation (D&E) abortion*

This method is carried out under general anaesthetic. The cervix is gently stretched and dilated to allow special forceps to remove the pregnancy in fragments. Any remaining tissue will be removed by suction as in vacuum aspiration. This takes 10–20 minutes. You may be able to return home on the same day if you are healthy and there are no complications.

#### *Abortion after 21 weeks*

Abortion at this stage involves either the surgical dilatation and evacuation method, or medical abortion. Whichever method is used, a doctor will ensure the heart of the fetus is stopped so it is not born alive. The procedure takes time and you will have to stay in the hospital or clinic, sometimes overnight. The pregnancy is removed either surgically or by use of drugs. Having a late medical abortion will involve you going through what is similar to labour to deliver the foetus.

#### *Late abortions*

It is sometimes possible to have an abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy, but only in cases where the foetus is damaged or the woman's life is in danger. It is important not to consider this procedure as a solution to an unplanned pregnancy; it is for use in emergencies only.

## Follow-up

You should not have sexual intercourse for two weeks after the operation. Abortion can be a distressing experience and you may decide to seek counselling or post-abortion support, which should be offered at the hospital that carried out the abortion.

### **In addition you should be offered:**

- Written information telling you what you are likely to experience, for example what bleeding to expect and how long it might last.
- A telephone number for advice on any problem or worry.
- The opportunity to discuss future contraception, get supplies, or be advised where you can get some.
- An anti-D immunoglobulin injection if your blood group is rhesus negative. This will help prevent problems in any future pregnancy. This should be given within 72 hours after the abortion.
- A follow-up appointment within three weeks of the abortion. This is particularly important after early medical abortion to check the abortion is complete. It can be at the hospital or the clinic where the abortion took place or with your GP, contraception or sexual health clinic.

## Private abortions

If you cannot have an NHS abortion or if you would rather be treated privately, you should ask your GP to contact one of the organisations which perform private abortions (there are also some which can be contacted without a GP referral). Marie Stopes and BPAS are two such reputable charitable organisations. If you find the cost of private treatment prohibitive, there is usually some form of loan or grant available.

## The Alec Turnbull Clinic

First floor, Raglan House,  
23 Between Towns Road  
Cowley  
Oxford  
OX4 3JH  
01865 456666  
<http://www.oxfordshirepct.nhs.uk/local-services/family-planning.aspx>

## British Pregnancy Advisory Service

08457 304 030  
[www.bpas.org](http://www.bpas.org)

## Children's Information Service

08452 262636  
The first contact for childcare and children's activities in Oxford.  
[enquiries@oxoncis.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@oxoncis.org.uk)  
<http://www.oxoncis.org.uk/>

## Equality and Diversity Unit, Oxford University

University Offices  
Wellington Square  
Oxford OX1 2JD  
General: 01865 (2)89825  
University Childcare Officer: 01865 (2)89841  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/child/>

## British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering

Saffron House,  
6-10 Kirby Street,  
London,  
EC1N 8TS  
Tel/Fax: 020 7421 2600/ 020 7421 2601  
[mail@baaf.org.uk](mailto:mail@baaf.org.uk)  
[www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)

## Brook – Putting Young People First

0800 0185 023  
[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

## Department for Education and Skills

0800 731 9133  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport)  
[www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk)

## Family Planning Association

0845 122 8690  
[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

## Gingerbread

0800 018 5026  
[www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)  
The nationwide support group for lone parents

## Isis Centre

Dartington House, Little Clarendon Street  
Oxford OX1 2HS  
01865 556648  
NHS counselling and information service  
Self-referral

## Oxford Citizens' Advice Bureau

95 St Aldates, Oxford OX1 1DA  
0870 2200608  
[www.oxfordcab.org](http://www.oxfordcab.org)  
(Other CABs: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk))  
[oxfordcab@cabinet.uk](mailto:oxfordcab@cabinet.uk)

## Oxfordshire County Council Access Team

PO Box 221  
Kidlington Delivery Office,  
Oxford, OX5 1YD  
[access@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:access@oxfordshire.gov.uk)  
01865 323126  
Oxford City, adoption, fostering and family placement team  
<http://tinyurl.com/5zfvmf>

## Inland Revenue

[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)  
Info on Child Benefits:  
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit/online.htm>  
Child Benefit Helpline: 0845 302 1444  
Info on Tax Credits:  
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits/index.htm>  
Tax Credits Helpline: 0845 300 3900

## Marie Stopes

0845 300 8090  
[www.mariestopes.org.uk](http://www.mariestopes.org.uk)

## Oxford GU Medicine (Sexual Health Clinic)

Harrison Department: Churchill Hospital  
Headington, Oxford, OX3 7LJ  
01865 231231  
<http://www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/forpatients/departments/womens/gum/gum.aspx>

## Oxford University Counselling Service

11, Wellington Square, Oxford  
01865 (2)70300  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/counserv.shtml>

## OUSU Student Advice Service

Thomas Hull House, New Inn Hall Street  
Bonn Square, OX1 2DH  
01865 (2)88450  
advice@ousu.org  
www.ousu.org

## Oxford Social Services

Churchill Hospital,  
Old Road,  
Headington,  
Oxford, OX3 7LJ  
01865 225960

## Oxford Citizen's Advice Bureau: Opening Times

	From	To
Monday	10.00am	1.00pm
Tuesday	10.00am	1.00pm
Wednesday	10.00am	12.00 noon
Thursday	12.00 noon	4.30pm
Friday	10.00am	12.00 noon
Saturday	10.00am	12.00 noon

## The Alec Turnbull Clinic

### Getting there:

Bus stop F3 on Queens Street, Bus number 4, which reads Rose Hill on front.

### Opening times:

Monday –Thursday: 9.30-7.00pm.  
Friday: 9.30-4.00pm. Saturday: 10.30-1.30pm

## Oxford GU Medicine (Sexual Health Clinic)

### Getting there

On a bus from the City Centre: The no.15, get off in Girdlestone Road. It runs every 10 minutes on weekdays.

### Opening Hours

Drop-in clinic 9:15am-11:15am (Mon-Fri, except Wednesdays) and 1:15pm-3:15pm (Monday-Friday)