



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS  
LIBERTY COMMISSION  
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

# What is the Abortion Pill?

## WHAT IS AN ABORTION PILL?

The two broad methods for abortions in the United States are chemical and surgical. The abortion pill is the most common type of chemical abortion. According to the Guttmacher Institute, chemical abortions now make up over half of all abortions in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

A chemical abortion (sometimes referred to as a medication abortion, medical abortion, or pharmaceutical abortion) is a method that uses an abortifacient to stimulate uterine contractions and end the pregnancy in a process similar to miscarriage. An abortifacient is a chemical or drug that causes embryonic death by either killing the child directly or by preventing implantation of the embryonic child in the uterine lining leading to death.

## HOW DO ABORTION PILLS WORK?

The method approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for chemical abortions is a two-step process involving the drugs mifepristone and misoprostol. Mifepristone (brand name mifeprex) ends a pregnancy by blocking the hormone progesterone, which is needed to maintain a pregnancy. Because this hormone is blocked, the uterine lining begins to shed, removing the child (in the embryonic state) that was attached. The second step, which occurs 24 to 48 hours later, requires taking misoprostol which causes the woman to expel the child and the uterine lining in a matter similar to a miscarriage.

## HOW DO ABORTION PILLS DIFFER FROM “EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVES”?

While all abortion pills are abortifacients, not all drugs that have, or may have, an abortifacient *effect* are classified as abortion pills, all of which have an abortifacient *intent*. For example, some forms of “emergency contraceptive” may prevent implantation, causing the death of an embryo, but because their intent is not to cause abortion, they are not generally considered abortion pills. Other forms of emergency contraception are taken after intercourse with the intention of preventing pregnancy by delaying ovulation because sperm can live inside a woman’s body for days after intercourse.

There are three main types of emergency contraception approved for use in the U.S. The first type uses Levonorgestrel, often available over the counter. As with oral contraception, it is unclear whether

this drug can ever have an abortifacient effect. The second, an ulipristal acetate regimen, and the third, a copper IUD,<sup>3</sup> both have an abortifacient effect. Any type of abortifacient, which takes the life of a preborn child, should be opposed by pro-life Christians.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROMOTE LIFE?

As Christians, we believe every human life is created in God’s image and deserves the utmost care and protection. Here are a few suggestions for promoting life and protecting the most vulnerable among us:

- *Pray for women facing unplanned pregnancies and their children:* Pray that they would receive the support and resources they need to choose life for their preborn child.
- *Support pregnancy resource centers:* These centers offer life-saving support, resources, and counseling to women and families. Volunteer and/or donate, and seek ways your church can be involved in this important work.
- *Advocate for pro-life, pro-family policies:* Write to your elected representatives, expressing your support for policies that protect the sanctity of life, promote family stability, and provide support for pregnant women and families.
- *Be a witness for Christ:* Live out your faith in a way that reflects the love and grace of Jesus Christ, promoting life and showing compassion to those facing unplanned pregnancies.



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1 Note that the Guttmacher Institute is a research institute that supports access to abortion. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/02/medication-abortion-now-accounts-more-half-all-us-abortions>.  
2 Some doctors will also prescribe a combined estrogen-progestin emergency contraceptive regimen.  
3 The FDA has not officially labeled a copper IUD for this purpose, even though it is regularly used by doctors and clinicians as an emergency contraceptive.