

## You choose

*What follows is a brief presentation of the main contraceptive methods the aim of which is to provide you with all the necessary information so that you can choose freely. To clear up any doubts or problems you may have, to obtain more precise and tangible information you can go to the Family Planning Clinics present throughout the Italian territory; as well finding all the help you need you will find people ready to listen to you.*

### Why use contraceptives?

Sexuality is an integral part of our life and for this reason it is important to live it out in a joyful, fulfilling and peaceful way, like a space in which to exchange affection with your partner, based on mutual respect. As well as being linked to reproduction, sexuality is a special and intimate way of entering into a relationship with another person.

Using contraception allows you to have a safe and stress-free sex life, without worrying about unexpected pregnancies. You may have many reasons for wanting to avoid this. You need to know about the different methods of contraception in order to be able to choose freely if and when to use them and what kind. Remember that you have the freedom and responsibility to choose the number of children you wish to have, when to have them and, if you have a companion, when to talk to him about it. This is because it is important that your child be wanted, received and cared for in the best possible way.

To help you choose the method of contraception most suitable for you, below we have included information on the different contraceptives available, the

correct way to use them, possible health risks and their degree of efficacy in avoiding pregnancy.

It is always good to get information from healthcare professionals (ostetrician, gynaecologist). Don't listen to your friends' advice and remember that each woman is unique and therefore has different contraceptive needs. Only you can choose the contraceptive that's right for you, together with your partner if you wish, with the help of healthcare professional and in accordance with your needs.

Family Planning Clinics, managed by the *Aziende Sanitarie Locali*<sup>1</sup> (ASL), are a free public service, predominantly aimed at women's health. Access to these services is indiscriminate, anonymous and free of charge and does not require a referral by your family doctor. The team that works there is made up of various specialists: social and healthcare worker, gynaecologist, andrologist, ostetrician, pediatrician, psychologist and others, which ensures a complete healthcare service ready to respond to any doubts you may have.

## What are the main methods of contraception?

### The pill

**What is it:** an oral contraceptive which prevents pregnancy by blocking ovulation and modifying the local functionality of the uterine mucous membrane.

**Efficacy:** only one out of 200 women who take the pill without making mistakes risks pregnancy; taking into account the most common errors, in reality, 3 out of 100 women can fall pregnant while on the pill.

**Where to go:** the pill must be prescribed by a doctor from the Family Planning Clinic, by your gynaecologist or by your family doctor; it is important that you visit one of these so that the doctor can examine you and get to know your medical history; he or she may then decide to prescribe you a pap-test and blood

tests. You will then need to take the prescription from your doctor and go to a pharmacy to purchase a packet (of 21) for one month;

**How is it used:** it is to be taken every day at the same time with a break every 3 weeks; if you forget to take it, see your doctor;

**Advantages:** your partner does not necessarily have to know; when you stop taking it, you can fall pregnant without any problems; actually, the pill regulates your period, reduces period pain and helps with acne. It is not true that it reduces your sexual desire. The price is accessible to all (the cheapest start at around 10 € per packet);

**Disadvantages:** you must undergo a medical examination before and after taking it; some women cannot take it, it is not recommended for those who have very high blood pressure or for those who smoke a lot; remember that the pill does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases.

### *Vaginal Ring*

**What is it:** a thin, flexible and transparent ring that must be inserted into the vagina; it is made of non-toxic and biocompatible material; like the pill it is a method of contraception which works by blocking ovulation;

**Efficacy:** like that of the pill;

**Where to go:** it must be prescribed by your doctor at the Family Planning Clinic, by your gynaecologist or by your family doctor; you will then need to take your prescription and go to a chemist to purchase the product;

**How is it used:** it is a soft, flexible ring which can be inserted and removed easily; you can put it in once a month, leave it in for three weeks and then remove it for one week; putting it in and taking it out is simple, to be effective it doesn't have to be put in a specific position;

**Advantages:** the same as the pill but it is easier to use because it only has to be

applied once a month; your partner has no way of either seeing or feeling the ring during sexual relations;

**Disadvantages:** the same as with the pill.

### Patch

**What is it:** a square patch, thin and flexible, a few centimetres wide; like the pill it is a method of contraception which blocks ovulation;

**Efficacy:** the same as the pill;

**Where to go:** like the pill it must be prescribed by your doctor at the Family Planning Clinic, by your gynaecologist or by your family doctor; you will then need to take your prescription and go to a chemist to purchase the product, which comes in a pack of 3 patches;

**How is it used:** you must apply one patch per week to the skin on your stomach, on your buttocks, on your upper arm, on your thigh or on your torso, when you apply it your skin must be completely dry and clean of any moisturizers or other substances which may stop the patch from sticking well, you don't need to change your daily habits, you can shower, swim, do sport, sunbake etc.;

**Advantages:** the same as with the pill but it is easier to use because you only have to change the position of it once a week;

**Disadvantages:** the same as the pill, but you may also have problems with allergic reactions on the skin where you apply the patch, if this occurs you must stop using it; your partner can easily tell that you are using it.

### Contraceptive Injection

**What is it:** a monthly or quarterly intramuscular injection which prevents pregnancy; **Efficacy:** like that of the pill;

**Where to go:** it must be prescribed by the Family Planning Clinic doctor, or by your gynaecologist after having carefully examined your medical history, as well as having seen a specialist and possibly having undergone some exams, you will be given an injection in your arm or in your buttocks every 4 or 12 weeks which will act as a contraceptive for one or three months;

**Advantages:** it is very user-friendly as the injection is done by your gynaecologist once a month or once every three months; it does not interfere in any way with your sexual activity so your partner has no way of knowing if you are using it; it reduces period pain.

**Disadvantages:** its effects are not easily reversible, it is actually possible that after having stopped the injections you are unable to fall pregnant for several months; it has side effects such as irregular menstruation and swelling which can continue for some months after you stop taking it.

### *Spiral (Intrauterine Device or IUD)*

**What is it:** a small plastic object wrapped in copper fibre, three or four centimetres long and a few millimetres thick which is introduced into the uterine cavity, the spiral acts on several different levels: it interrupts the fecundation process as well as that of the fertilization of the egg;

**Efficacy:** higher than that of the pill;

**Where to go:** the spiral must be prescribed and subsequently inserted by a gynaecologist, after an attentive gynaecological exam, and must be removed in the same way (usually after five years) by a gynaecologist. Remember to have a gynaecological check-up at least once a year. Once a month, usually at the end of the menstruation, it is good to check if there is a string a few centimetres long that hangs from the external cervical orifice into the vagina, if the string is not there get to your gynaecologist as quickly as possible, the spiral may have been inadvertently expelled;

**Advantages:** once inserted it lasts five years and you do not need to use other contraceptive precautions, furthermore, it only effects the genital apparatus and not the entire body. Your partner has no way of seeing or feeling the spiral during sexual intercourse;

**Disadvantages:** it can cause period pain to increase as well as the intensity of your menstruation and pain during intercourse; these side effects are frequent but they tend to disappear with time (after 2/3 months). You will still have to have a check-up at least once a year. It does not protect you from sexually trasmitted diseases.

### Diaphragm

**What is it:** a rubber cup that is covered with spermicide and inserted into the vagina before each sexual encounter;

**Efficacy:** it offers a high level of protection but must be correctly used each time; Where to go: you can only use it after having undergone a medical examination at a Family Planning Clinic, or after having seen your gynaecologist; your gynaecologist must choose the type and the size of diaphragm so that it is perfectly suited to your vagina;

**How is it used:** the gynaecologist also has to show you how to put it in, remember that after sexual intercourse you have to wait six hours before taking it out;

**Advantages:** it has no side effects on your body, after having used it you must wash it with water and soap and put it back in its case, it is not costly and it lasts 5 years, you can stop using it whenever you want without having to see a doctor;

**Disadvantages:** to insert the diaphragm you have to interrupt sexual intercourse, your partner knows that you use it, it can cause irritations in some women and it doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted diseases.

## Prophylactic or male condom

**What is it:** a very thin, rubber latex film which collects the sperm and stops it from flowing into the vagina;

**Efficacy:** in one year of usage 10 out of every 100 women fall pregnant;  
**Where to go:** you can purchase them in chemists, supermarkets, tobacconist's shops, and automatic distributors are available 24/7 in cities; the packet must be kept away from sources of heat, and never in your wallet or in the glovebox of your car, they must be handled carefully;

**How is it used:** it must be slid onto an erect penis and taken off after intercourse;

**Advantages:** it has no side effects and does not require a prescription; it does protect you from sexually transmitted diseases;

**Disadvantages:** it is a method of contraception which can only be used by men and can cause awkwardness between partners. The cost varies according to the type and depending on where you buy them.

## Female condom

**What is it:** a soft but strong polyurethane sheath which is inserted into the vagina before each sexual encounter;

**Efficacy:** it offers a high level of protection only when used correctly;  
**Where to go:** it can be bought directly at the chemist and does not require a medical prescription;

**How is it used:** it cannot be used together with a condom and even if it is already lubricated it is advisable to lubricate it before use with lubricant which can also be bought at the chemist. The condom must be lubricated and inserted into the vagina; you should practice putting it in and taking it out several times before

using it for the first time. It can only be used once and you do not have to remove it immediately after intercourse;

**Advantages:** it does not have any side effects on your body, it doesn't cause any interference during intercourse if you put it in place up to 8 hours beforehand. It protects you from sexually transmitted diseases;

**Disadvantages:** it takes practice to be able to use it, inexperience can make it an ineffective method of contraception.

### *Morning after pill*

**What is it:** an emergency contraception method which prevents pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse;

**When is it used:** if you did not use any contraception, if the condom broke during intercourse, if you didn't calculate your non-fertile days correctly, if you didn't take the contraceptive pill;

**Where to go:** you need to contact a clinic, your family doctor or an emergency room immediately. Remember that the sooner the morning after pill is taken after intercourse the more effective it is. Your doctor will give you a prescription for the pill you need which you will need to purchase at the chemist; remember to check the use by date and to read the instructions enclosed carefully; remember that healthcare facilities have a duty to give you a prescription for the morning after pill!

**Efficacy:** the morning after pill reduces by 75% the probability that unprotected sexual intercourse results in pregnancy but it is not effective in preventing pregnancy if you have had other unprotected relations during the month.

## Spermicide

**What is it:** it can be in pill, cream, foam, jelly, suppository or spray form, they act as a barrier which stops the spermatozoid from entering the uterus;

**Efficacy:** it is not a very reliable contraceptive method;

**Where to go:** you can buy them at the chemist and no medical prescription is required;

**Advantages:** they are easy to use;

**Disadvantages:** they interfere with the spontaneity of sexual intercourse because they must be used before each sexual encounter where there is penetration, so your partner is aware of it. They do not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases and some studies show they can irritate the vaginal mucosa which can facilitate the transmission of the HIV virus.

## Coitus interruptus or withdrawal

**What is it:** a natural method of contraception which is dependent upon the man;

**Efficacy:** it is not a very reliable contraceptive method;

**How to do it:** your partner must know when to pull his penis out of your vagina, immediately before the sperm comes out. If the intercourse is to be repeated your partner must first urinate and wash his genitals before the intercourse is repeated;

**Advantages:** there is no risk to your physical health, it could be useful in the event of unplanned intercourse;

**Disadvantages:** it interrupts the intercourse. It does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases.

## Natural methods

**What are they:** based on periodic abstinence from sexual relations. Generally, if your menstrual cycle is regular, a woman can fall pregnant after complete intercourse - or rather, intercourse that ends with the ejaculation of the sperm into the vagina – around 6 days per month, three days before ovulation, the day in which ovulation occurs and the two days which follow. The most common methods are: the Ogino-Knaus method, the taking of your basal body temperature, the Billings method, or the “persona” system;

**Efficacy:** they are not a very reliable contraceptive methods;

Where to go: obstetricians and gynaecologists in clinics are able to give you all the information necessary;

**Advantages:** there are not side effects on your body, they encourage you to get to know your body better, there is no cost;

**Disadvantages:** you need to know your body well, you need to abstain from sex for at least 6 days per month and your partner has to agree. They do not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases.

## Myths and dangers

Some women use various contraceptive methods which are not at all considered to be safe.

- **Vaginal lavages** carried out immediately after intercourse are in no way to be considered a contraceptive method, on the contrary, they can reduce the effectiveness of spermicides.
- **Standing up** immediately after sexual relations and urinating do not reduce the risk of conception. Remember: it has no contraceptive significance!

- Even when **breast-feeding** you can fall pregnant.
- Always remember that **rituals** and **beliefs** are not contraceptive methods.

### What if I'm pregnant?

*Before choosing freely and responsibly whether to be a mother and asking yourself all the related questions, you must make sure you really are pregnant.*

### How can I tell?

Remember that the signs of a possible pregnancy are not the same for all women. As well as your menstrual cycle being late some women suffer from nausea, vomiting, mood swings and constant tiredness but this isn't the same for all. Remember that only later will your breasts enlarge, your weight vary and your abdomen grow.

**So if your period is late and you haven't used contraception during sexual intercourse with your partner or you have used precautions such as coitus interruptus or counting days, you could be pregnant.**

As early as the first day your period is late, you can see if you are pregnant by doing a urine test.

You can do the test at home and purchase the kit at the chemist (it usually doesn't cost more than 15€). In just a few minutes, you can get a result with 99% accuracy, but it is important that you follow the instructions in the box carefully and that you check the use by date of the test (located on the outside of the box). If the test is positive, it means you are pregnant. Remember that in some cases the result can be negative (even in case of pregnancy), if you do it too soon. In case of a negative result, if you continue to not have your period, you can try to do the test again after 3 days.

The test can also be done in a public or private analyses laboratory. If you opt for the public analyses laboratory, remember to go to your trusted family doctor or gynaecologist to get the prescription and remember that upon receiving the test you will have to pay a prescription charge. Remember to pick up your result. If your test is positive, you will need to undergo another examination by a gynaecologist who will measure your uterus to see how far along you are. Then, you will have to decide what to do.

### *What choices do I have?*

Discovering that you are pregnant can cause you great joy but also contrasting emotions and doubts. Sometimes, discovering you are pregnant can cause you distress.

If you are pregnant you have three choices:

- to have the child and raise it;
- to have the child and give it up for adoption or for foster care
- to end the pregnancy.

There is no right choice for everyone. **Only you can decide what the right choice for you is.** Choosing is not easy, you will have to consider various factors keeping in mind your own desires. You might decide to talk about your concerns and feelings with someone who can support you, like your partner, a family member or a trusted friend. You can ask for help and discuss your options with a consultant or a trusted friend. You can ask for help and discuss your options with a consultant from the Family Planning Clinic, who will help free you from any pressure which may cause you to make a decision against your will. You can speak about it with your family doctor or with a gynaecologist you trust.

If you decide to become a mother, you need to go within a short amount of time, to a Clinic or to your gynaecologist who will prescribe you the necessary analyses

to check that everything is going well.

If you are thinking about interrupting your pregnancy, you must decide as soon as possible. The Italian State only guarantees the right to voluntarily interrupt a pregnancy if it is done within 90 days from conception.

While you are deciding, be sure to take care of yourself. Do not drink alcohol, or smoke, or take medicine without seeing your doctor.

### *I want a child*

If you have decided to become a mother, the Italian State will help you to carry your pregnancy to term ensuring you medical assistance, your job and if you don't have a Permit of Stay, you are still allowed to give birth safely in Italy.

### *What if I am an illegal immigrant?*

If you are a pregnant and a foreigner and you do not have a Permit of Stay **you cannot be deported** until your child is six months old. You have the right to go to the Immigration Office at the Police headquarters and ask for a **Permit of Stay** for medical care. You will have to give them your details, tell them where you live and present a certificate provided by an ASL doctor or by a Clinic which shows you are pregnant and specifies the date you expect to give birth. Also, for the same period of time, the father of the child cannot be deported either if he lives with you, and he should also be given a permit of stay which is linked to yours.

With the receipt given upon application for your permit of stay you can ask to be **registered with the national healthcare service** at the healthcare registry office of the ASL. This way you will be exempt from paying the prescription charge check-ups requiring instrumental and laboratory diagnostics and for all

the specialized services aimed at safeguarding your maternity. The permit of stay will allow you to acknowledge your child and to register him or her at the registry office so that he can have a birth certificate which identifies the father and mother.

Remember that the permit of stay for medical purposes (pregnancy) does not allow you to leave Italian territory or to work and it cannot be changed into another kind of permit of stay. This permit of stay is aimed at remedying an illegal status to safeguard maternity, but its validity runs out six months after the birth of the child.

#### *What kind of assistance can I expect?*

In Italy every woman (Italian, legal foreign citizen or illegal foreign citizen) has the right, by law, to free medical check-ups which correspond with specific periods during the pregnancy. The basic check-ups are free (your family doctor has a list which can be used as a reference), many of the specialist analyses are not free however, and you will have to pay. Specialist services required because your doctor fears there may be some malformation of the fetus constitute an exception. In fact, over the last few years, through the use of ultrasounds and the application of genetic techniques, it has become possible to diagnose early on possible congenital anomalies of the fetus: the most common tests are amniocentesis, nuchal translucency, and the taking of a sample of the chorionic villi. For example, amniocentesis is a simple and painless test which allows for the early diagnosis of the baby's sex and of any anomalies - chromosomal, congenital or acquired - which would appear when the child is born in the form of various illnesses. Due to the elevated cost of the test, it is only free for:

- women over the age of 35;
- women who have other children with chromosomal anomalies;

- if one of the parents or a close family member has chromosomal anomalies;
- a high risk index is shown in the double and triple tests;
- fetal anomalies are found in the ultrasound.

Remember that once your child is born, you have the right to specialist visits, laboratory analyses and other tests, for free, until he or she is six years old. All exams must still be prescribed by your GP and are to be carried out in the public healthcare facilities (hospitals and clinics) or private facilities which operate within the National Healthcare Service.

### *What about work?*

If you have a employment contract and are employed with a project-based contract, or as a profit-sharing associate and you are pregnant, you cannot be fired until your child is one year old. You may lose your job if: the company you work for goes bankrupt, you commit a serious offence at work for which you are fired, your contract finishes.

If you are an employee, you have the right to paid leave in order to be able to attend medical visits or specialist examinations, but remember to hand-in the certificates which show the date and time of the visits.

Normally, in the last two months of pregnancy and up until three months after giving birth the Italian law obliges you to abstain from work. Remember that you can work up until one month before the birth if you present a medical certificate which specifies that your pregnancy is regular and that the working conditions do not represent a risk for you and your child. This way you can benefit from the remaining 4 months off work after having given birth. Your time off work, also called maternity leave, is considered to be the same as if you were working. During the 5 months off you should, by law, receive 80% of your usual wage. This is true both of employees, or of those registered with

the Separate management program of the INPS<sup>2</sup> (project-based collaborator, profit-sharing associate), or of self-employed workers, (craftswoman and tradeswoman, direct cultivator, agricultural entrepreneur). If you are an employee your collective agreement may require that your wage be paid to you in full. To obtain maternity allowance:

- employees must present an application both to the INPS office closest to them (or to their habitual place of residence) and to their employer, as a rule, before their leave begins;
- workers registered with the Separate management program must present their application to the INPS office closest to them (or to their habitual place of residence) and, where applicable, to their customer - as a rule - before their leave begins;
- self-employed workers (craftswomen, tradeswomen, direct cultivators, metayers, professional agricultural entrepreneurs) only need present their applications, after giving birth, at the INPS office closest to them (or to their habitual place of residence).

Furthermore, if you are an employee or registered with the Separate management program, you have the option of stopping work (parental leave) for a maximum of 6 months within the first 8 years of your child's life. During these 6 months you have the right to an allowance equivalent to 30% of your wage. Once you return to work, as an employee you have the right to daily rest times which will allow you to stay close to your child. Furthermore, you and your partner can have alternate, paid days off work in the event that your child be sick, in this case you must present a doctor's certificate to your employer which certifies your child's illness.

If you are unemployed or a housewife – foreigner with a permanent residence card or an EC long-term permit of stay – you can ask for a maternity allowance at your local municipal office after the birth of your child and within the first

six months of the child's life.

If you do not have family here and you find yourself in serious economic difficulty you can speak to Social Services at the Municipal office to ask for help in seeking out housing during your pregnancy and immediately after the birth of your child, as well as financial aid for the period following the birth of your child.

*If I can't or don't want to take care of the child?*

*Once you have given birth you have the right to choose – within ten days from the birth of your child – if you want to acknowledge the child or not, if you want to take on the responsibility of raising him or her or if you would prefer to give him or her up for adoption or foster care.*

*What is adoption?*

If you have chosen to give birth but you cannot or do not want to take care of the child, you have the right to not acknowledge your child and to give it up for adoption - in the utmost confidentiality - to a family that will take the child in as their own.

**Not acknowledging the child you have given birth to is not a crime, but it is a crime to abandon it.** You just have to tell the doctors before giving birth that you do not intend to recognise the newborn. If you decide to do this your delivery will come about in absolute secrecy. Remember that you will not be pointed out to any authorities, and all the hospital staff and social workers are obliged to act with the utmost discretion. The law safeguards your rights and ensures there is no way of tracking you down.

If, after giving birth, you have doubts or hesitations, you have the right to a period of reflection (10 days) in which you can choose independently whether

or not you wish acknowledge the child. The hospital will assign a social worker to you who will inform you as to the help which is available to you in both cases. Once you have given birth and have been released from hospital you can leave the child there and he or she will be temporarily put into the custody of a care facility until the 10 days provided for by law are up.

If during those 10 days you do not acknowledge the child, the newborn will be pointed out to Juvenile Court by the hospital for the declaration of adoptability, he or she will be given a name by the Municipal Registry Office closest to the place of birth and will obtain Italian citizenship.

Shortly after, within approximately ten days, the newborn will be put in the care of an adoptive family and he or she will be treated as their own child.

### What is foster care?

If you are going through a difficult time (illness, serious financial difficulty, imprisonment, etc.) and you are momentarily unable to care for your child, you can choose to hand the child over temporarily to a foster family who will take him or her in and ensure the child the financial support, upbringing, education and affection it requires.

Foster care can be:

- residential, when your child goes to live for a time with the foster family but maintains a relationship with you;
- part-time, when your child spends part of the day with the foster family, or weekends or a holiday period.

Remember that foster care is not the same as adoption, it is only temporary: the maximum duration is 24 months, although this can always be renewed. Keep in mind that it will be social services (the service which organizes foster care in each municipality or territory) who will help you decide which kind of foster

care best suits your situation, and the right foster family for your child's needs. Remember also that you have a duty to arrange with the foster family the days and times in which you wish to visit your child and an obligation to try your best to solve, as quickly as possible, the problems which caused you to have to opt for foster care. Social services will always be on hand to help you with this.

*I don't want to have a child*

**Your decision to have a child or not is a personal and should be made freely.** *Abortion is legal in Italy since 1978. If you do not want to or cannot carry your child to full-term, the Italian law guarantees you the freedom of choice. Voluntarily interrupting your pregnancy is free and is carried out through the public health care system. Remember that your ASL is under the obligation to ensure your right to end your pregnancy within the time limit provided for by the law (90 days) or to put you in touch with a facility close by who can do so.*

*What does law no. 194 provide for?*

If you discover that you are pregnant and for personal reasons you decide not to keep the child, **the Italian law allows you to have an abortion within the first 90 days of your pregnancy** (calculated on the basis of the first day of your last menstrual cycle), which in terms of the ultrasound is the equivalent of 12 weeks and 6 days.

**If you are considering ending your pregnancy, make your decision as soon as possible.**

**The first step is to speak with a doctor that you trust as quickly as possible:** the gynaecologist from your clinic, your regular gynaecologist or your family doctor are the most suitable.

The clinical staff must go through the different methods of abortion with you: they will have to inform regarding your rights should you decide to continue with your pregnancy, and explain to you the support that the State will provide should you decide to keep and raise the child, as well as giving you information regarding the voluntary interruption of your pregnancy.

Should you desire it, your partner can also attend this informative conversation. If you are undecided as to what to do you can talk with a social worker or with a psychologist more than once. Your identity and that of the father (should you wish to reveal it) will be kept confidential.

Remember that these conversations are facultative and no one can force you to have them.

According to the law, at the end of your visit (and possibly of your conversation) your doctor should invite you to take some time – not less than 7 days – to think things over and should give you a certificate which certifies that you have spoken. During this time you can think further about your decision. Should your doctor find your condition to be “urgent”, he can free you from the obligation of the 7 day reflection time by writing “urgent” on your certificate.

**You can voluntarily end your pregnancy even if you are underage.**

If you wish to involve your parents in your decision, they will need to accompany you to the doctor and will have to sign the certificate for the voluntary interruption of your pregnancy along with you.

If however you do not wish to involve your parents, the best thing is that you go to the clinic closest to you. There, the social worker or psychologist will contact the Juvenile Court who will nominate a guardianship judge who will give, in place of the parents, the consent for the abortion. Remember that no one involved is allowed to contact your parent without you knowing.

**The voluntary interruption of your pregnancy can be carried out after the first 90 days if the pregnancy or the delivery are thought to present a serious danger**

**to the woman's health or if there are serious anomalies or malformations of the soon-to-be-born baby.** In these cases the interruption of the pregnancy is called a **therapeutic abortion**.

*What does the voluntary interruption of a pregnancy consist in?*

With the certificate that the doctor gives you, you can make an appointment to end your pregnancy for a date after the 7 day period of reflection. This appointment can take place in a public hospital or in a private facility which operates within the National healthcare system. You do not risk anything by having an abortion as long as it is carried out by a public facility. Remember that you can change your mind at any time.

In Italy the voluntary interruption of your pregnancy is carried out:

- **by means of a surgical operation**

The operation involves the contents of the uterus being aspirated, this is often followed by a careful cleaning of the uterine walls (curettage). The operation lasts about 20 minutes. You are able to return home about 2 to 8 hours after the operation or possibly the following day, depending on hospital policy. Every hospital has its own policy regarding anaesthesia. Some do the operation using local anaesthetic, others use general anaesthetic.

Sometimes, the hospital staff prescribe you with the contraceptive pill, which you need to take the night in which you have the operation (which is considered like the 1st day of your period).

However, usually you are expected to go for a check-up within the two weeks which follow the operation. This check-up is very important because as well as checking that the operation has gone well it is a time when you will be prescribed with a contraceptive treatment.

- **or the pharmacological method**

The abortion pill RU486 is an alternative to the surgical operation which can only be used within the first 49 days, or before the seventh week. The abortion pill can only be given to you in a hospital and you must stay in the hospital from when you take the pill until the medical staff are certain that the pregnancy has been ended. Remember that this is not a medicine which can be taken at home without medical supervision.

Compared to traditional methods the Ru486 is not invasive. Actually, it doesn't require anaesthetic or surgical operations and, if used correctly, it works in 95% of cases. Remember, however, that should it not be effective you will then have to undergo the surgical operation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Local Healthcare Institutes

<sup>2</sup> N.d.T. Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale – Italian National Social Security Institute