

## Menstrual Extraction

Menstrual extraction is an alternative abortion technique developed by the Los Angeles Self Help Clinic in 1971, prior to the legalization of abortion. The procedure is similar to a suction abortion, and is done within the first six weeks of pregnancy. This technique involves specialized, sterile equipment and a knowledgeable support group. All mechanical abortion methods carry a risk of injury and infection, and should be done in a sanitary location by trained persons. Because this technique is complicated, we will not describe it here. Menstrual extraction is a method to explore if you are interested in alternative abortion services. An herbalist or a women's health care worker in your area may be able to give you more information.

## REFERENCES

- Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *The New Our Bodies, Our Selves*, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 1984. *General book on women's health care and self-awareness. NOTE: this book does not recommend herbal abortion methods.*
- Federation of Women's Health Centers, *How to Stay Out of the Gynecologist's Office*, Peace Press, 1981. *Good book on self-help techniques for women's reproductive health.*
- Potts, Billie, *Witches Heal*, DuRêve, Ann Arbor, MI, 1988. *Book on a variety of herbal and spiritual self-health practices*
- Weed, Susan S., *An Herbal for the Childbearing Years*, Ash Tree Publishers, Woodstock, NY, 1986. *More advanced book on herbalism dealing with women's reproductive health.*

The authors of this pamphlet are a group of Boston area anarcho-feminists dedicated to the idea of putting health care back into our own hands. Our members include a physician assistant, and we have consulted an herbalist and a variety of resources. This pamphlet is solely the work of the authors, and no organization or publication mentioned bears any responsibility for its contents.

Because of the difficulty of finding information on alternative abortion techniques, we cannot guarantee their effectiveness. We may be able to provide further information or contacts in your area. Please share with us your experience using these methods, as well as any other knowledge you may have.

# REGAINING CONTROL

## *Taking Health Care Into Our Own Hands*



Today in America, our right to control our bodies is under attack. Religious groups and conservative politicians are eroding our freedom to make our own decisions about reproductive health. This spring the Supreme Court will hear several cases which could have grave implications for reproductive rights. Growing militant anti-abortion groups such as Operation Rescue are staging increasingly frequent attacks on women's clinics. Despite the fact that abortion is now legal, it is inaccessible to many women, especially those who are poor or young. Many women are unaware of or unable to take advantage of their reproductive options due to geographical isolation or a lack of knowledge due to a morally repressive atmosphere.

It is important that we begin to educate and organize to take control of our bodies. We can learn about alternative abortion techniques and establish services such as the Jane Collective, an underground network of abortion providers in Chicago in the early 1970s. There are many concerned health care workers who could be allies in such a program. We can establish support networks for teenagers who must leave their homes or deal with the court system to obtain abortions. We can educate ourselves about alternative means of contraception and abortion such as traditional herbal methods. Much of this knowledge is kept alive by women in Native

American and immigrant communities, and is being reclaimed by midwives, witches, and herbal healers, and by those seeking to develop health care outside the control of the medical establishment and the state. We can initiate independent research, production and distribution of new drugs, such as the early abortifacient pill RU-486, which is currently being used effectively in France and China, but is denied women in this country due to anti-abortion boycott threats and the fear of liability lawsuits.

While it is necessary to demand that the government respect the right to reproductive freedom, we cannot rely solely on the state. Legislators have a poor record of accountability on reproductive rights issues, and Supreme Court justices are accountable to no one. Reproductive freedom is too crucial to be left to the state. We must claim for ourselves the fundamental right of reproductive choice, and take our health care and control of our lives into our own hands.

### ARE YOU PREGNANT?

There are many things other than pregnancy that can make you miss a menstrual period, including stress, poor diet, lack of sleep, or an interrupted schedule. If you have not had a pregnancy test, do not assume you are definitely pregnant.

Common early signs of pregnancy (1-2 weeks after conception) are: 1) missing a period; 2) a period with less bleeding or lasting for fewer days than usual; 3) swelling, tenderness, and/or tingling in the breasts; 4) frequent urination; 5) fatigue; 6) nausea or vomiting (morning sickness); 7) feeling bloated and/or crampy; 8) increase or decrease in appetite; 9) changes in digestion (heartburn or constipation); 10) mood changes. Signs of pregnancy may vary.

Pregnancy tests are available through many clinics and medical practitioners. Family planning and women's health services often offer anonymous free pregnancy testing. Look under 'Pregnancy Services' in the yellow pages. Some centers advertising free pregnancy tests (such as Birthright) are actually fronts for anti-abortion groups. Well known centers such as Planned Parenthood may be the most reliable choice.

You can buy home pregnancy testing kits in drug stores for about \$10.00. These tests are easy to perform, but give false results more often than lab tests.

Most of the tests used by clinics, as well as home tests, are urine tests. These are accurate for most women when a period is about 13 days late. Laboratory blood tests which can detect pregnancy as early as 7-12 after conception are available, but may be expensive.

### Non-Herbal Methods

The following information concerns non-herbal techniques that have been used to induce abortion.

#### Vitamin C

Vitamin C is the safest of all methods listed. Drink plenty of liquids while taking Vitamin C to reduce stress on the kidneys (Vitamin C should not be used by women with kidney problems). Unlike the herbal methods, some sources have reported Vitamin C to be effective up to 6 weeks after a missed period, although it is most effective when used early. Vitamin C should be taken  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour before meals. Vitamin C is unlikely to induce abortion in women who take large doses regularly. Vitamin C can be purchased in powder or pill form in health food and drug stores. Vitamin C may be combined with herbal methods.

*Dose:* 1 gram, 6 times a day

*Duration:* 5 days

*Side effects:* diarrhea, nausea



#### Additional Methods

The following methods can be used either alone or with herbal methods or Vitamin C. The effectiveness of these methods is not clear, but some women have reported them to be useful.

#### Reflexology

Focus in the region of the uterus. Massage the ankle just below the ankle bone. Use your thumb held vertically to massage the bottom edge of the bone. The pressure must be deep and firm. Massage 5 minutes per foot several times a day. Deep, prolonged massage of the belly by a trained person may also bring about abortion.

#### Acupuncture/Acupressure

Acupuncture must be done by someone who knows the appropriate technique. The Needle Spleen Pancreas (SP6) and Colon (C4) sites on both the left and right side are used. The needles should remain in for 30 minutes, during which time they should be stimulated every 2 minutes by turning them in a clockwise direction. Contractions should begin during the next hour or the following night. Acupressure should also be done by a trained person.

#### Hot Baths

Hot baths are often mentioned as a method of inducing early abortion. Their effect is essentially the same as that of relaxation and stress reduction.

## List B

**Black Cohosh** (*Cimicifuga racemosa*, also known as black snakeroot, bugbane, rattleweed, squawroot)

**Part of plant:** (a) root or (b) tincture (buy pre-made)

**Recipe:** (a) boil 1 oz. root in water, leave to stand for 10 minutes, dilute the resulting liquid with water: 1 teaspoon liquid to one cup of water.

**Dose:** (a) 1 cup, three times a day (b) 5 drops, 3 times a day.

**Duration:** 6 days maximum for root or tincture.

**Side effects:** drowsiness, increased urination, nausea, vomiting, headache.

**Blue Cohosh** (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*, also known as beechdrops, blue ginseng, squawroot)

**Part of plant:** root

**Recipe:** boil 1 oz. root in water, leave to stand for 10 minutes, dilute the resulting liquid with water: 1 teaspoon liquid to one cup of water.

**Dose:** 1 cup, three times a day

**Duration:** 6 days maximum

**Side effects:** drowsiness, increased urination, nausea, vomiting, headache.

## Other Herbs

Many other herbs are reported to bring about abortion (for example, parsley, tansy, yarrow). We found less information about these herbs, and much of it is inconsistent. If you want to learn more about them, consult an herbalist who has had experience with herbal abortions.

**Rue** (*Ruta graveolens*)

★ I've used this successfully ★

**Part of plant:** (a) leaves (b) tincture (buy pre-made)

**Recipe:** (a) pour  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup boiling water over 1 teaspoon dried herb, let sit for 15 minutes

**Dose:** (a)  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup a day (b) 10 drops, 4 times a day

**Duration:** 4 days

**Side effects:** nausea, vomiting



## For Excessive Bleeding

When using any abortion method, there is a risk of severe bleeding. Shepherd's Purse will reduce bleeding. Keep it on hand when using alternative abortion techniques.

**Shepherd's Purse** (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

**Part of plant:** tincture (buy pre-made)

**Dose:** a few drops, applied under the tongue.

**Duration:** repeat at 15 minute intervals; if heavy bleeding (more than one pad in 15 minutes) persists for more than 30 mins, seek medical care.

## Pregnancy Termination

If you are pregnant, you have several options. Many women choose to terminate their pregnancies. While the decision to have an abortion is not an easy one, it is important to be aware of all available options.

Most abortions performed today are surgical abortions using the suction or D&C method. Abortions are currently legally available, but are expensive, and women who are poor, underage, or outside of urban centers may have trouble obtaining them. Abortion laws vary from state to state.

Surgical abortions are safest when performed within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy (the first trimester). For information about obtaining an abortion, contact the National Women's Health Network (202-543-9222) or the National Abortion Federation (800-772-9100), or look in the yellow pages under 'Pregnancy Services'. If you are a teenager, some of the services in your area may be able to help if you need a court hearing to comply with parental consent laws.

## ALTERNATIVE ABORTION METHODS

There are many alternatives to surgical abortion. These vary in safety and effectiveness. The following guidelines are applicable to all alternative methods. Whenever possible, consult with someone who is familiar with the technique you plan to use.

### General Guidelines

- 1) The earlier these methods are used, the more effective they will be. It is best to use them between the first day you expect your period and the 10th day after it is due. Effectiveness will decrease significantly after this time.
- 2) Alternative methods are most useful for women with regular menstrual cycles. It is important to be familiar with your cycle as part of an overall program of reproductive health. You can determine your monthly cycle by charting it on a calendar over a period of time.
- 3) If these methods are not successful and you carry the pregnancy to term, or if you are breastfeeding, the effects on the fetus or infant are not known.
- 4) Start with a small dosage (to check for side effects) and move up to the full dosage in small increments if there are no adverse effects. Do not take more than the recommended dosage, or for longer than the recommended duration. This will not increase the effectiveness, but may greatly increase the risk of serious side effects.

- 5) Do not use these methods if you have high blood pressure, epilepsy, allergies; diabetes, heart or kidney problems, or other health concerns, or if you are taking any drugs; these may aggravate existing medical problems or dangerously alter the way the method would normally work.
- 6) Do not use these methods if you have an IUD or if you have had a recent uterine or pelvic infection. These methods are ineffective if your period does not come while you are taking birth control pills.
- 7) These methods are not for contraception. Do not take them on a regular basis. Long term effects of prolonged use are not known.
- 8) Some side effects may be expected, such as nausea or short term vomiting or diarrhea, and cramps and moderate bleeding. If you develop severe side effects such as convulsions, persistent vomiting or diarrhea, or severe bleeding (needing to use more than one pad in 15 minutes), stop using the method immediately and seek medical care from a trained professional or the nearest hospital emergency room.
- 9) Stop using the method once your period starts, but continue if you only have spotting.
- 10) All abortion methods entail the risk of incomplete abortion. If possible, have backup access to surgical abortion in case the alternative method fails. To reduce the risk of infection after any abortion, do not use tampons for bleeding; use only menstrual pads.

### Herbal Methods

Women have used herbs throughout the ages for abortion. This knowledge has been passed down through traditional practitioners. Herbal methods should not be used casually. They can be extremely dangerous if used improperly. It is important to be aware of your body and its reactions to the treatment. Learn as much as you can about the plants you wish to use. Herbs have varying effects on different women. It is important to get the advice of someone who has had experience using them. You may be able to locate an herbalist in your area through women's centers, health food stores, or spirituality resources.

Most herbs are used by brewing them as a tea. This is done by pouring boiling water over the herbs and letting them sit in a closed container for the recommended amount of time (water should be boiled in a covered, non-aluminum container). Strain the tea before drinking; do not eat the leaves, as they may be poisonous. Use only the recommended part of the plant. Whole herbs should not be confused with herbal tinctures or herbal essential oils. Oils can cause convulsions and death. Herbs can be found in health food stores and spiritual shops. Check the Latin name, since common names may vary.

The herbs below are the ones we found the most information about, and which seem to be most commonly used. Much of our data is from a report by a group of women in Europe who have been using these herbs successfully in an alternative abortion practice. We have verified the information as thoroughly as we could using a variety of sources.

The best results are reported to occur when using two plants in combination, one from *List A* and one from *List B*. The best combination seems to be pennyroyal and blue cohosh. Do not combine two herbs from the same list.

#### List A



**Pennyroyal** (*Hedeoma pulegiodes*, also known as American pennyroyal, mosquito plant, squaw mint, tickweed)

*Part of plant:* whole plant; *do not use oil*

*Recipe:* pour 1 cup boiling water over 1 teaspoon of dried herb, let steep for 15-20 minutes.

*Dose:* 1 cup, three times a day.

*Duration:* 6 days maximum.

*Side effects:* nausea, numbness of fingers and toes, sweating, dizziness, headache; *pennyroyal oil may cause convulsions and death*

#### **Mugwort** (*Artemisia vulgaris*)

*Part of plant:* leaves or flowers

*Recipe:* pour 1 cup boiling water over 1 teaspoon of dried herb, let steep for 15-20 minutes.

*Dose:* 1 cup, three times a day.

*Duration:* 6 days maximum.

*Side effects:* sweating, nausea.

#### **Cotton root bark** (*Gossypium*)

*Part of plant:* root (use only organically grown cotton root; commercially grown cotton contains dangerous pesticides).

*Recipe:* boil 1 ounce of root in 1 pint of water, leave to stand for 8 hours, dilute the resulting liquid with water: 1 teaspoon liquid to one cup of water.

*Dose:* 1 cup, three times a day.

*Duration:* 6 days maximum.

*Side effects:* nausea, vomiting.