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Long-term physical and psychological health consequences of induced abortion: review of the evidence.

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Induced abortion is a prevalent response to an unintended pregnancy. The long-term health consequences are poorly investigated and conclusions must be drawn from observational studies. Using strict inclusion criteria (study population >100 subjects, follow up >60 days) we reviewed an array of conditions in women's health. Induced abortion was not associated with changes in the prevalence of subsequent subfertility, spontaneous abortion, or ectopic pregnancy. Previous abortion was a risk factor for placenta previa. Moreover, induced abortion increased the risks for both a subsequent preterm delivery and mood disorders substantial enough to provoke attempts of self-harm. Preterm delivery and depression are important conditions in women's health and avoidance of induced abortion has potential as a strategy to reduce their prevalence. Only review articles including the single published meta-analysis exploring linkages between abortion and breast cancer were relied upon to draw conclusions. Reviewers were mixed on whether subsequent breast neoplasia can be linked to induced abortion, although the sole meta-analysis found a summary odds ratio of 1.2. Whatever the effect of induced abortion on breast cancer risk, a young woman with an unintended pregnancy clearly sacrifices the protective effect of a term delivery should she decide to abort and delay childbearing. That increase in risk can be quantified using the Gail Model. Thus, we conclude that informed consent before induced abortion should include information about the subsequent risk of preterm delivery and depression. Although it remains uncertain whether elective abortion increases subsequent breast cancer, it is clear that a decision to abort and delay pregnancy culminates in a loss of protection with the net effect being an increased risk. **TARGET AUDIENCE:** Obstetricians & Gynecologists, Family Physicians. **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** After completion of this article, the reader will be able to define the terms and, to outline the epidemiologic problems in studying the long-term consequences of abortion, and to list the associated long-term consequences of abortion.

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