Pregnancy begins when a male sperm and a female egg cell unite to form the first, unique cell of a new human being. This special cell begins to divide within 10 hours; within seven to 10 days, the rapidly growing human embryo attaches to the wall of the mother's uterus and continues to grow. Within eight weeks, all body organs are present; within 12 weeks, all organs and systems are functioning. The remainder of the pregnancy is simply a time of growth and fine-tuning for this new human being.

According to our present culture, there are many alternatives available to a pregnant woman, all of which she should thoroughly consider before making a decision regarding the future of her pregnancy. The decision she makes will affect the rest of her life, so she has the right to learn all the facts.

Following are medical answers to some questions you may have regarding abortion.

■ How are most abortions performed?

Suction aspiration or *suction abortion* is the most common method of abortion in early pregnancy, up to about 12 weeks after conception. During this prodedure, the cervix — a circular muscle at the base of the uterus — is forced open and a powerful vacuum device is used to suction out the human fetus in pieces. The human fetus is approximately two inches long at 12 weeks.

Abortion providers often refer to the developing human fetus as "products of conception," or "contents of the uterus." *Fetus,* the medical term for the developing human from eight weeks after conception, is actually a Latin word which means, "young one," or "offspring."

After 12 weeks, a painful *D&E abortion* may be performed. The abortion provider would force open the cervix, impose a plier-like instrument, twist and pull off the human "young one's" limbs, and crush the skull and rib cage so that they may also be evacuated.

Another method used from the fourth through the ninth month of pregnancy is the *D&X abortion.* Guided by ultrasound, the abortion provider dilates the cervix, grabs both legs with the forceps and pulls the legs into the birth canal (vagina), and delivers the entire body of the child, except for the head. The abortionist them jams scissors into the base of the skull and opens them to enlarge the hole. The scissors are removed and a suction catheter is inserted so that the child's brain tissue may be suctioned out. This eliminates the possibility of the child being born alive.

■ Is abortion painful?

Unless the mother is anesthetized (put to sleep), it can be very painful.

Medical research has also shown that the "young one" feels pain.

■ Is abortion safe?

You may have heard people incorrectly say abortion is safer than childbirth. Actually, *this "fact" is inaccurate for several reasons:*

■ Maternal death rates used in comparison actually include all abortion-related deaths — the very data to which they are compared.

■ Maternal mortality figures also include deaths from ectopic pregnancies, which can result from scarring left by infection after an abortion.

■ Maternal mortality figures typically include deaths from car accidents, physical abuse, homicides, and other causes not related to childbirth.

■ Studies generally compare the surgical abortion procedure with maternal deaths that include deaths *during the entire nine months of pregnancy and up to one year after delivery.*

Each year, there are deaths and severe infections as a result of legal abortion procedures.

■ Does abortion have long-term consequences or side-effects?

There are always consequences when we choose to do something we feel is not ethically right.

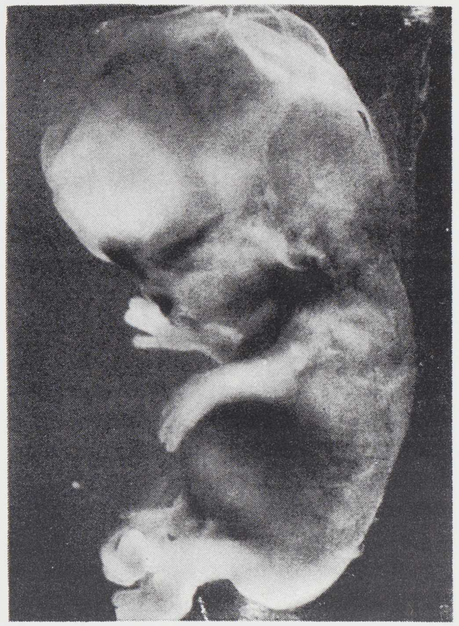
Many women feel emotional consequences of the "choice" within moments or days after the abortion; others may deny and repress negative feelings for many years.

Emotional effects include unexplained depression, repressed emotions (even total denial of having had an abortion), thwarted maternal instincts, intense feelings of guilt and/or grief, increased use of alcohol, drugs, or even smoking, thoughts of suicide.

It is not uncommon that women must go to the emergency room because of hemorrhaging and/or infection caused by puncture of the uterus or by pieces of the human fetus left in the uterus. Low-grade infections often go undetected by the woman until, years later, she finds the infection has scarred her Fallopian tubes and she is unable to ever have other children.

New studies are indicating that there is a considerable connection between abortion of the first pregnancy and the development of breast cancer, possibly due to the sudden interruption of undifferentiated tissue development in the breasts.

Most importantly, abortion has permanent consequences. A life cut short which "could have been fulfilled" can be a reality difficult to face for years to come.



SEVEN WEEKS AFTER CONCEPTION

■ Is this pregnancy really human or just a "blob"?

■ By days 18 to 24 (about three weeks after conception), the developing embryo's heart begins to regularly pump blood through tiny blood vessels.

■ By six to seven weeks, brain waves are detectable on the EEG.