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Fetal Pain & Viability in Later Abortion

Abortion is available at AWC until 22 weeks and 6 days in pregnancy. If you need an abortion in the second trimester (14–26 weeks) you may have questions about fetal development, which we've made an effort to address below.

Is it possible for a fetus to feel pain during an abortion?

No. According to the best scientific evidence we have, obstetrical and gynecological organizations have reached a consensus: fetal pain is not possible during abortion.

Although some nerves reach the spinal cord of an embryo early in development, they only reach the brain late in pregnancy. This means that during the stage of pregnancy when abortions are done the "wiring" that carries pain-causing impulses is not connected to the fetal brain.

Fetal pain during abortion is impossible for two reasons:

- Nervous system network is not in place
- Pain perception requires a filtering-through experience, which a fetus does not have



Can a fetus think or feel?

Even if the "wiring" were in place, electroencephalogram (EEG) studies indicate that the earliest point in pregnancy when a fetus shows a brain response to nerve stimulation is 28 to 29 weeks – again, well after the stage of pregnancy when abortions are done. There is also an increasing body of evidence which indicates that a fetus never actually enters a state of wakefulness while in the uterus.

What is "viability"?

The Supreme Court has defined viability in the context of abortion as "when, in the judgment of the attending physician on the particular facts of the case before him, there is a reasonable likelihood of the fetus' sustained survival outside the womb, with or without artificial support."

- Both in the law and in medical science, viability is not equated with a particular gestational age in pregnancy.
- At less than 21 weeks, no delivered baby has ever survived.
At 23 weeks, only 12.5% of delivered babies will survive without disabilities.
At 25 weeks, 27.5% will survive without disabilities.
- Viability outside the uterus depends on many factors, including age of gestation, sex, birthweight, and the sophistication of the medical facilities available.

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