

**Meet The People Shaping The Future Of Energy:** Reinventing Energy Summit - 25 November in London

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## 'I had a mail-order abortion': The women forced to go it alone



On-line help and medication when you need it  
Brian Lawless/PA Archive/PA Images

They arrived in a small beige envelope. Getting hold of the abortion pills was nerve-wracking enough, says Catriona. "But the really hard part came after."

Catriona, a marketing consultant living in Ireland, is one of a growing number of women who buy medications online to terminate their pregnancy in countries where abortions are illegal. One source is a site called Women on Web, which provides free medical advice along with the pills for those who are less than 9 weeks pregnant. A study published this week found it received 1438 requests for help from Ireland and Northern Ireland last year, and numbers have nearly tripled since 2010.

Catriona found herself pregnant earlier this year when she already had a 5-month-old baby. The last pregnancy had been hard; she had developed pelvic problems that left her in agony for the last two months and she was still in pain. "My body was still recovering."

Many Irish women travel to England for abortions but this wasn't practical for Catriona as there was no one to mind the baby; her partner had just started a new job and so couldn't take time off work and their parents live abroad.

### Women on Web

They ordered abortion pills from Women on Web. As it is illegal to send any medicines through the post in Ireland, and packages marked as such get stopped at customs, they gave the address of a friend in Northern Ireland. They asked her permission to accept a package but for her own protection didn't say what it contained. "I was worried that the post office would know what it was," says Catriona.

When her partner drove to collect the envelope Catriona was nervous he might have an accident and be discovered with the pills on him. "I had horror stories in my head."

When he returned safely, Catriona had to steel herself to take the medicines. "I was hesitating for a few hours, but I knew I wanted to take it."

After the second dose, the pain began. "It was like really strong period pain in my abdomen and back. But I took ibuprofen and it was manageable." She bled heavily for about four hours, and passed some clots. Then the pain started easing and by about midnight she was able to sleep. The next day the pain and bleeding was lighter.

The bleeding only stopped completely after three weeks, but doctors on the website reassured her this was normal. If the bleeding had been excessive she had been advised to go to hospital and claim she was having a miscarriage. Hospital staff can't tell the difference.

"I think being at home with my partner made it a lot easier – I could lie down on my own bed," says Catriona. "But it would be easier if it wasn't illegal. You could have people to talk to and you would not have to keep it secret. It felt like we were doing something really awful. I didn't tell anyone. You just never know."

**Read more:** Home abortions are safe – we should let women do it themselves

