

baby has a disability. Usually women tend to be given a very negative idea of what the baby's life will be like. Expectant parents should be helped to respond positively to their baby and be given information on what can be done to help him or her.

- It is defeatist to believe that killing disabled people is the answer to the challenges of disability. Society should welcome and care for all its members and help everyone to achieve their full potential. What does the abortion of disabled babies say to adults and children with disabilities?
- A society stands to be judged by the way it treats its most disadvantaged members. How will our society be judged on its treatment of disabled unborn babies?
- Babies who would live only a short time after they are born still have a right to live their life and to not be killed by abortion, however long or short their lives may be. The fact that a person's life will be short does not justify deliberate killing.



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Pre-Natal Testing

What you need to know



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Pre-natal testing

Almost all pregnant women are given pre-natal tests to find out if their baby is at risk of being disabled. If a risk is detected, a further test will be offered to try to confirm whether the baby is disabled.

Can pre-natal tests hurt the mother or baby?

Some pre-natal tests are thought to have no direct dangers to the mother or the baby (e.g. ultrasound). Invasive tests (e.g. amniocentesis, where a needle is inserted into the womb to draw some fluid) can cause the baby to miscarry. Babies can also be injured by amniocentesis and, very rarely, mothers can be damaged by this test.

What happens if a disability is detected?

If a disability is detected the woman will be offered an abortion. Under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967 in Britain, abortion is allowed

without any time limit (i.e. up to birth) if the baby is disabled.

Why do people choose to abort disabled babies?

Many women experience pressure to have an abortion if a test shows their baby is disabled. The reason for offering most pre-natal tests for handicap is to abort affected babies. Very often, the parents will not have any personal experience of people with the disability concerned. Often a negative picture of the disability is presented, instead of pointing out that people with disabilities can lead very fulfilling lives.

How many babies are aborted because of disability?

In 2001, 1,762 babies with a suspected disability were aborted in England and Wales. 118 of these abortions took place after 24 weeks. In Scotland a total of 141 babies detected as having a disability were aborted, six later than 24

weeks. 90% or more of both babies with Down's syndrome and babies with spina bifida are aborted. These are two of the most common disabilities for which abortions are done.

Pre-natal testing: Ethical or not?

It is always unethical to test unborn babies with a view to aborting them. This is because:

- Every human being has the right to life. It is the fundamental right which enables all other rights to be enjoyed. It is the right to have rights and without it all other human rights are impossible.
- Disabled people are no less human and no less valuable than anyone else, and have an equal right to life. They are entitled to the support necessary to achieve their full potential.
- Abortion does not prevent disability, it only prevents a baby who already has a disability from continuing to live.
- Women may experience great pressure to have pre-natal testing and to abort if their