

# Three's a Crowd

Imagine being faced with the most important decision of your life and realising that you are not the one who can make it



# M

**Y GIRLFRIEND IS OFFICIALLY** late – she tells me in bed, after sex. The pill has

turned her ovaries into battery chickens and even a day late is cause for alarm. She's a week over. She's going to buy a test tomorrow. I have no savings. I rent. In nine months I'll be 26 years old. I realise that if being a father is a crucial part of being a man, telling your girlfriend that you're not ready is far more character building. Either raise a kid for 20 years or chat about... abortion.

My preparation for this life event – because that's what it is – has been sketchy. It's her choice. Her body. I'm practically a feminist. Last year I went to a Halloween party dressed, ironically, as a pro-life

supporter. For the costume I pinned an "abortion is murder" poster to my chest and painted a doll red to make it look like a foetus. The irony didn't gel with the vampires, zombies or Christians, but that night I spouted a drunken diatribe about how "it's a woman's right to choose". I've kept this bleeding-heart-liberal view right up to this second... when it actually matters. During the six hours until the closest pharmacy opens, my political stance shifts from pro-choice to mandatory-abortion. I want this problem to go away and in twenty-first

century South Africa it's a free, clean and easy procedure that I suddenly decide only a fool wouldn't take advantage of.

It could be the most important decision of my life and I can't make it.

## **ABORT YOUR FEELINGS**

Lying awake, I watch the shadows and imagine little McNallys tearing my house apart. There's an action plan here somewhere. First, you've got to purge yourself.

"Make all your feelings heard," says Dean Peacock, *Men's Health* Best Man

winner and co-founder of Sonke Gender Justice. "Voice your opinion, how much support you're willing to give and confirm that it's her decision," he says. Most men go into an "if only" cycle after the event, where they wish they'd done more. On the flip side the kicker is you have to take responsibility that your input, how you frame it and how angry you get, will influence her decision. You are not a ghost in this and she's probably hoping for your support. This sometimes ignites massive friction in a relationship.

"The anger is going to come when the man and woman can't agree on what to do," says *Men's Health* psychology editor Rafiq Lockhat. "When there's total agreement – whatever it is – then it's okay."

When we started going out, my girlfriend and I made a pact. She would take the pill and have that metal screw (the contraception gadget that looks like the worm in a bottle of



**Often a woman will get rid of it because she's tired of you and doesn't want you to be the father of her kid**

tequila) installed. If I got her pregnant, then she would have an abortion. Done deal. We eyeballed each other that day as a modern couple with careers, ambition and libidos. I worry now that the conversation has been forgotten. There was also a clause built in stipulating that I would drive her to the clinic and hold her hand during the procedure.

This is less enticing and, hell, according to Lockhat, "often a woman will get rid of it because she's tired of you and doesn't want you to be the father of her kid." This is a harsh reality to handle even if you downright loathe children. Either way, the mechanics and mistakes aren't the main problems. I'm mad that this woman could wreck my life. She has all this power and, in the dark honesty of the wee hours, I don't trust her ability to make what I think is the right decision. She's obsessed with being broody. Not that I blame her: there are six women in her office either busy swelling or on maternity leave. The yearning for kids (apparently) is building up like an irrational mid-twenties juggernaut. But how can I put my life in those hands?

**START A FIGHT**

The scary part is it feels like if I pushed, flared up, really put some emotional welly into this, I could get my way. At the cost of her being so disgusted with me that she wouldn't be able to stomach carrying my offspring for even nine minutes, I could be a free man for the next 20 years. It would

**82**  
Percentage of men who were depressed for up to 37 months post abortion.

take one weekend of being childish, yet I feel sick with guilt over it. Most men get these guilt spikes if they urge their girlfriends to abort. "Understand that bullying won't work – it'll make her angry and this makes it easier for her to punish you," says Peacock. This might mean a custody battle or more intense alimony payments.

Don't worry, I know what's "right" and "wrong" but the fact that I can't have what I want is a spiralling, emasculating hell. "These are your only choices: you are either going to be a supportive father or not," says Peacock. That's it. "If you accept – as a man – early on that this is not your fight or your issue then it'll be easier to handle when it does come up." And you need to be preparing early on – like from when the (assumedly faulty) condom gets unwrapped.

**Tie the Knot – Contraception For Dummies**

**Here are your contraception options and your chances of slipping one past the goalie**

**THE PILL** Means sex at any time of the month and a lower risk of ovarian cancer.

**Reliable?** Most pills fail 0.2 percent of the time in a year. But some as much as eight! And if she's drunk and vomiting, there's a chance the pill won't get absorbed.

**THE JIMMY HAT** The old condom has become synonymous with sex.

**Reliable?** Even when you follow the instructions, there's a three percent chance of failure. If you include breakage and misuse it shoots up to 12 percent.

**INTRAUTERINE DEVICE** An IUD is a small, plastic, often T-shaped device surrounded by a copper wire.

**Reliable?** A 0.3 to 0.8 percent rate of failure in the first year. And even less after that.

What are most guys doing about contraception? Check out our poll at [www.menshealthsa.co.za/2008May](http://www.menshealthsa.co.za/2008May)

# Invest in your face.

## Get a free start. Now at the Clinique counter.

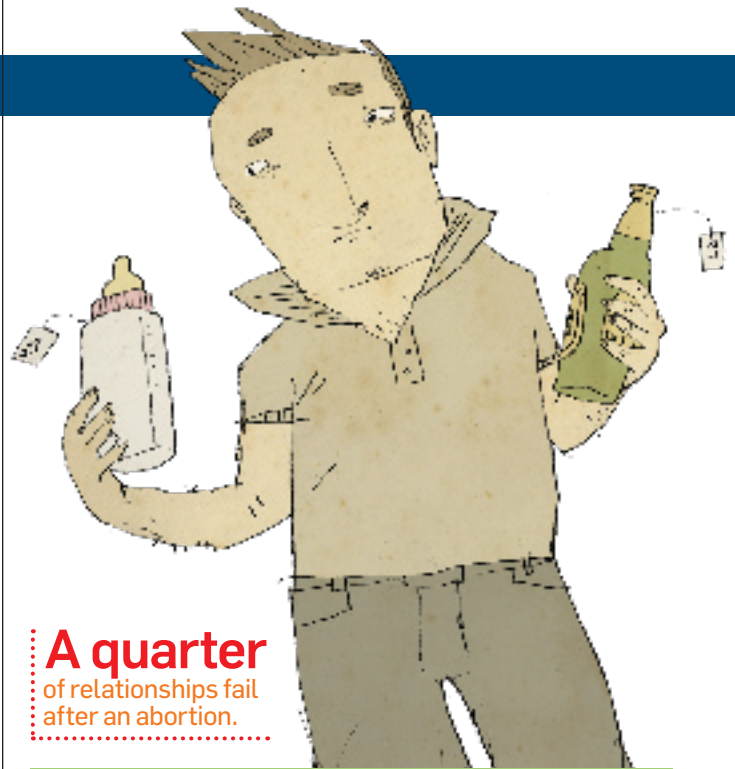


Come to Clinique and  
receive a free\* trial  
supply of your skin's  
custom-fit  
Skin Supplies For Men™  
3-Step Skin Care System,  
with Expert Consultation.

# CLINIQUE skin supplies for men

\*No purchase necessary. One entry a client, please.  
While supplies last.

Available from the following Authorized Retailers:  
Edgars, Focchini, Sphibonide and Thewissen.



**A quarter**  
of relationships fail  
after an abortion.

## Global Gagging

**Why the world is screwed up**

Imagine if you worked at an American company like Microsoft in South Africa and all you were allowed to drink was Pepsi, all you could eat was McDonalds. America is paying your salary, so you're going to live (and die) by their way of life.

Well, one of the first actions Bush took when in the White House hot seat was to do just this – but worse. If you're a clinic in South Africa offering abortions, or even abortion-related information, the US withholds your funds. It stops money from going to hospitals and health clinics in developing countries that offer abortions. So if we want American money we have to stoop to Bush's "family values" that not even the people of America have to endure (Bush passed this foreign policy on the 28th anniversary of when abortion was legalised in the US). It's helped keep abortion a relative taboo, despite its legality. The argument is that it will make abortion rarer, but there's no evidence of this. Essentially, if we accept US cash, we can't even use our own cash to fund abortion-related projects. Another Big Mac for dinner, dear?

## CRACK OF DAWN

First of all, she can't go. "Squeeze out a couple of drops!" I yell from the bedroom, irritable and tired. We wait – she cradles the brimming cup – we've been going out for two years and I've never been this close to her urine. It's irrepressibly awkward. If we keep this kid (or I'm going to be paying alimony) hot damn, I decide I want every day of its ill-conceived life documented and Face-booked. I'll be involved. "Keeping the kid (rather than aborting it) is irritating and upsetting but not traumatic," says Lockhat. In one study, adolescent guys who had a kid were less distressed (with the nappies, late nights and responsibility) than those who had it aborted. I hold my breath. If it's a girl, I like the name "Three". If it's a boy, "Paul Junior". What often happens is men, after the initial shock, get to quite fancy the idea of baby powder around the house. It's your kid in there (albeit a prototype). That's the con of being a man: even if you're busting to be a father, it's still her choice. As if in a karmic reward for my commitment her urea turns blue. That means she's not pregnant, for now. The blood drains from my bowels and back into my face. We joke and tease about how we're "kinda disappointed", but of course we're not. I saw her face fill with relief, an almost insulting amount. Still, there's always next month.

MH