

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OPTIONS: CONTRACEPTION

What Is Contraception?

Contraception is prevention of pregnancy by any method.

How Pregnancy Occurs

Each month, approximately 2 weeks after a woman bleeds (menstrual period), the ovary releases an egg (called ovulation). The egg travels to the fallopian tube, which connects to the uterus. If sex occurs near the time of ovulation and the man ejaculates (climaxes), sperm are released into the vagina. Sperm travel through the opening of the uterus (cervix) into the uterus and then into fallopian tubes. If a sperm fertilizes the egg, pregnancy occurs.

How Pregnancy Can Be Prevented

Pregnancy can be prevented in three ways: stop ovulation, stop sperm from getting to eggs in the fallopian tube, and change the uterine lining (endometrium) so it won't support pregnancy. The type of birth control you use and the extent to which you use it will determine how effective it is at preventing pregnancy.

Pills

Birth control pills, the most common method, contain hormones similar to ovarian hormones and stop ovulation. Depending on the type, you will need to take them daily. They may help regulate your cycles, lighten your periods, and help with premenstrual symptoms and acne. Side effects may vary with the hormone used and dose and may include irregular bleeding, cramping, weight gain, or spotting between periods. Use of birth control pills plus smoking, high blood pressure, obesity, or family history of clotting disorders may lead to increased chance of stroke, heart attack, or blood clots.

Implants

Implants are capsules containing a certain hormone that are surgically placed under the skin on the arm by your health care provider.

Progesterone Injections

A contraceptive containing only the hormone progesterone is injected every 3 months and stops ovulation.

Barriers

Condoms, diaphragms, and cervical caps are barriers that stop sperm from getting to the egg. All should be used with a spermicide (chemical that kills sperm).

A condom is a thin rubber or animal membrane covering that is put on the penis. A rubber, dome-shaped diaphragm is put in the vagina over the cervix. A cervical cap (small rubber cap) fits right on the cervix. It works like the diaphragm but is smaller.

Intrauterine Devices (IUDs)

IUDs are small devices inserted into the uterus by a health care provider. They change the uterus or fallopian tube so pregnancy cannot occur. The Copper T is a small T-shaped plastic IUD with a wrapping of copper. Another IUD produces progesterone.

Permanent Surgical Methods

The two methods are tubal ligation (tying the tubes) in a woman and vasectomy in a man. A tubal ligation is done by special (laparoscopic) surgery. Very small cuts are made and fallopian tubes are sealed or closed. In vasectomy, which is minor surgery, tubes called vas deferens in the scrotum are tied off.

Abstinence (Rhythm) Method

Not having sex around the time of ovulation prevents pregnancy. This method works only if the woman has regular cycles. It is not recommended for young women whose cycles are still changing.

Withdrawal Method

This method involves removal of the penis from the vagina before ejaculation. This method is not recommended due to its high failure rate.

How Do You Choose a Contraception?

Some couples may use more than one form of birth control. Things to think about when choosing a method include how each is used, age, health, frequency of sex, and partner's feelings about methods.

What Is “Emergency Contraception”?

Emergency contraception is any form of birth control used after sex to prevent pregnancy. It is also known as “EC” or the “morning after pill.” It works best when used within 24 hours after sex but can be effective up to 5 days after sex.

DOs and DON'Ts in Deciding About Contraception

- ✓ **DO** think about protection from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) when choosing a method. Certain methods prevent both pregnancy and STDs.
- ✓ **DO** try a new method if you don't like your current one.
- ✓ **DO** talk with your partner to figure out the best method.

- ✓ **DO** talk with your health care provider about the benefits and risks of your chosen methods.
- ⊗ **DON'T** assume that your partner is taking care of it.

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NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: Tel: (202) 638-5577; Website: <http://www.acog.org>
- National Women's Health Information Center: Tel: (800) 994-9662; Website: <http://www.4woman.gov>
- MedlinePlus: Website: <https://medlineplus.gov/birthcontrol.html>
- Planned Parenthood: Website: www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control

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