

Birth Control: What Method is Right for me?



How do I choose a birth control method?

Choosing which type of birth control is best for you is very personal. The right type of birth control for you depends on many things, including your medical and family history. You will also want to consider how effective you need birth control to be, when or if you want to have a baby, the cost of the birth control method, and what you have to do, such as take a pill each day or put on a condom before having sex. Also, your past experiences with birth control may affect what type you want to use. Every type of birth control has risks, benefits, and possible side effects that you should think about when you choose which is best for you.

How does birth control work?

Every month, an egg from your ovaries travels into your fallopian tubes on its way to your uterus. Then the sperm that are placed in your vagina during sex travel to the egg. All birth control methods stop the sperm from fertilizing (joining with) the egg. Different types of birth control stop this in different ways.

What are my choices for long-term, reversible birth control?

The long-term reversible birth control methods are more than 99% effective, and less than 1 of every 100 women who use them will get pregnant each year.

Intrauterine Device (IUD): An IUD is a small T-shaped device that your health care provider puts through your vagina and cervix into your uterus (womb). A string attached to the IUD comes out of your uterus into the top of your vagina. The string will not bother you or your sexual partner. It is used to pull out the IUD when you want it removed. The copper IUD works for up to 10 years. It has no hormones. The copper changes sperm so sperm cannot fertilize an egg. The hormonal IUDs work for up to 3 to 5 years, depending on which one you choose. These IUDs release a small amount of a hormone called progestin, which thickens your cervical mucus to keep sperm from reaching an egg.

Implant: The implant works for up to 3 years. It is a small rod your health care provider places under the skin in the back of your arm. The implant releases a small amount of progestin, which keeps your ovaries from releasing an egg.

What are my choices for short-term hormonal birth control?

Short-term hormonal birth control methods are 91% to 94% effective, and 6 to 9 of every 100 women who use them will get pregnant each year.

Injectable: You will receive an injection (shot) every 3 months. The injection contains a long-acting form of progestin that keeps your ovaries from releasing an egg.

Birth Control Pills: You will need to take a pill at the same time every day. Some pills have 2 hormones, estrogen and progestin, and some have only progestin. The pill with 2 hormones keeps your ovaries from releasing an egg. The pill that only has progestin (minipill) thickens your cervical mucus to keep sperm from reaching an egg. You will need a prescription from your health care provider to get the pills from a pharmacy.

Skin Patch: You put a small sticky patch on your lower abdomen, buttock, or upper arm that stays there and is changed once a week for 3 weeks. During the fourth week, you do not wear a patch and will have your period. The patch has both estrogen and progestin, which keep your ovaries from releasing an egg. You will need a prescription for patches from your health care provider.

Vaginal Ring: You put a small, flexible plastic ring in your vagina for 3 weeks. During the fourth week, you take out the ring and will have your period. The ring has both estrogen and progestin, which keep your ovaries from releasing an egg. You will need a prescription from your health care provider to get new rings.

What types of reversible birth control are available that have no hormones?

The copper IUD is the only very effective non-hormonal birth control method. The following non-hormonal methods are 72% to 88% effective, and 12 to 28 of every 100 women who use them will get pregnant each year.



Barrier Methods: A condom, diaphragm, or cervical cap keeps sperm from reaching an egg. You must use a barrier method every time you have sex. A male condom is placed over the man's penis. A female condom is placed in your vagina. A diaphragm or cervical cap is placed over your cervix.

Withdrawal Method: The man pulls his penis out of your vagina before he ejaculates (releases semen) so sperm cannot reach an egg.

Spermicides: Spermicides come in gels, creams, foam, suppositories, vaginal film, and a sponge you put in your vagina. Spermicide is a chemical that kills sperm. You must use it each time you have sex.

Fertility Awareness Method: This method helps you learn when you are most likely to get pregnant. On those days, you either cannot have sex or must use a barrier method.

What are my choices for permanent birth control?

Permanent birth control methods are more than 99% effective, and less than 1 of every 100 women who use them will get pregnant each year. If you are thinking about a permanent method, you must be sure you will never want to have a baby or another baby. If you are not sure, consider another type of birth control.

For Women

Tubal Ligation: You can have your fallopian tubes blocked so that sperm cannot reach an egg. This can be done in several ways and requires surgery with anesthesia (being put to sleep). The surgery is done in a hospital or outpatient clinic. A tubal ligation is effective right away.

Essure: A small coil is placed through your cervix and uterus into each of your fallopian tubes. This causes scar tissue to develop so that sperm cannot reach an egg. This procedure can be done in a health care provider's office, and you will not need anesthesia. You will need to be checked 3 months after the procedure to make sure your tubes are blocked. You will need to use another type of birth control during those 3 months.

For Men

Vasectomy: A vasectomy cuts the tubes that carry the sperm from the testes to the penis. This procedure can be done in a health care provider's office and does not require anesthesia. It takes about 3 months for all of the sperm to be gone from a man's semen so you will need to use another type of birth control during that time. The man will need to give a sample of his semen to a health care provider who will look at it under a microscope to make sure all the sperm are gone.

What are my choices if I didn't use birth control but don't want to get pregnant?

If you did not use birth control or are not sure that your birth control worked, you can take emergency contraceptive pills or have a copper IUD placed within 5 days of having sex. The pills work best the sooner you take them. Some emergency contraceptive pills require a prescription, and others you can buy at a pharmacy without a prescription.

For More Information

Planned Parenthood

Detailed information on every available birth control method.

<http://plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control/>

US Department of Health and Human Services

Frequently asked questions about choosing a birth control method.

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/birth-control-methods.html>

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