

# Birth Control Methods

## What are birth control methods?

Birth control methods are ways to keep from getting pregnant when you have sex. There are many different ways to try to prevent pregnancy. Some methods work better than others.

You may want to choose a kind of birth control that will help keep you from getting a sexually transmitted disease or infection (STD). Sometimes you may need to use more than 1 method to prevent pregnancy **and** infection. You can use latex or polyurethane condoms to protect against infection. Condoms are the only birth control method that will also lower your risk of being infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Hormones, natural family planning, and withdrawal do not give any protection against infection.

## What are the different methods of birth control?

### Hormone Medicine

Hormone medicines are birth control medicines for women. They use manmade forms of the female hormones estrogen and/or progesterone. The hormones stop a woman's ovaries from releasing an egg each month. They also make it harder for sperm to get into the uterus and harder for a fertilized egg to stay in the uterus.

- **Birth control pills** are taken every day according to a schedule prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- One **shot of Depo-Provera**, which contains progesterone, can prevent pregnancy for 3 months.
- **Vaginal rings** are soft rings that you put into the vagina yourself. The rings release hormones into the body. A ring stays in the vagina for 3 weeks. Then you take it out and have your period. After 1 week you put a new ring into the vagina and repeat the cycle.
- **Patches** with hormones may be put on your skin. You put a new patch on your skin each week for 3 weeks. You don't use a patch during the 4<sup>th</sup> week and you have your period. Then you repeat the cycle.
- The **implant (Implanon)** is a small, thin capsule containing progesterone. Your healthcare provider puts it under the skin of your arm. The implant prevents pregnancy for up to 3 years.

You need to see your healthcare provider to get any of these hormonal forms of birth control.

### Birth Control Devices

Most birth control devices provide barriers that stop sperm from getting into the uterus. The barrier may be physical or chemical.

- The **male condom** is a tube of thin material. Latex rubber or polyurethane is best. You roll the condom over the erect penis before the penis touches any

part of a woman's genital area. The male condom is the best protection against STDs.

- The **female condom** is a pouch you put into the vagina before sex. It is made of polyurethane and has 2 flexible rings. It covers the vagina, the cervix (the opening to the womb inside the vagina), and the area around the vagina. It may protect against some STDs, such as HIV and hepatitis B.
- **Spermicides** are chemicals that kill sperm. They come in different forms, like foam, gel, cream, film, suppository, and tablet. You put them into the vagina no more than 30 minutes before sex. Spermicides work much better when they are used with another form of birth control, like a condom or diaphragm. Spermicides do not protect against STDs.
- The **sponge** is a round, soft piece of polyurethane foam. It is soaked with a spermicide. No more than 24 hours before sex, you dampen the sponge with water and put it into the vagina.
- The **diaphragm** is a soft, shallow rubber or silicone cup with a flexible rim. Before you have sex, you fill the diaphragm with a spermicide and put it into the vagina, over the cervix.
- The **cervical cap** is a soft silicone cup that you put into the vagina and over the cervix. It is like a diaphragm except smaller. Like a diaphragm, it must be used with a spermicide to work right.
- The **intrauterine device (IUD)** is a small plastic device containing copper or hormones. It is put inside the uterus by your healthcare provider. The IUD keeps the egg from getting fertilized or implanting and growing in the uterus. The IUD may be kept in the uterus 3 to 10 years, depending on the type, before it must be replaced with a new one.

You can buy condoms, spermicides, and sponges at drug and grocery stores without a prescription. Diaphragms and cervical caps need to be fitted by a healthcare provider. IUDs must be put into the uterus by a healthcare provider.

## **Sterilization**

Sterilization is a procedure done to close the tubes that carry the sperm or eggs. It may be done with surgery through your belly or with special devices inserted through the vagina and into the fallopian tubes. A woman or man who is sterilized will no longer be able to have children. The procedure is usually a permanent method of birth control. It's very rare to have this procedure if you are younger than 21 years old or if you have no children.

Surgery to remove a woman's uterus (hysterectomy) also causes sterility.

## **Natural Family Planning and the Withdrawal Method**

The natural family planning methods of birth control don't use any devices, drugs, or surgery. To prevent pregnancy you avoid having sex on certain days of each menstrual cycle. Some of the other methods of birth control are usually more reliable.

The withdrawal method involves taking the penis out of the vagina before semen starts coming out of the penis. Often sperm get into the vagina before or during withdrawal. Withdrawal is **NOT** a reliable way to prevent pregnancy.

## **Emergency Birth Control**

There are pills that can be taken for emergency birth control. The pills contain a hormone that will prevent pregnancy if a woman takes them very soon after she has unprotected sex. A woman might take these pills if a condom breaks, or if she had sex without any birth control. Depending on the type of medicine in the pills, the pills need to be taken no later than 72 to 120 hours (3 to 5 days) after sex. You can buy some types of emergency birth control pills without a prescription. Carefully follow the package instructions or your healthcare provider's directions for taking the pills.

A copper intrauterine device (IUD) is another way to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. The IUD must be put into the uterus by a healthcare provider within 5 days after sex.

Sterilization, the IUD, and hormone medicines, such as birth control pills, are the most effective methods of birth control. However, the diaphragm and condom can be nearly as reliable if they are used correctly.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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