

Birth Control

Choosing the method that's right for you

What kind of birth control is best for me to use?

The type of birth control you should use depends on your needs. Some people only need to prevent pregnancy. Other people may also want to protect themselves or their partners from diseases that can be passed by having sex. These *sexually transmitted diseases* (STDs) include AIDS, herpes, genital warts and syphilis. You and your family doctor can talk about what birth control method is right for you.

How well does birth control work?

For any method to work, it must be used every time you have sex, and it must be used the right way. The table on page 2 shows the failure rates of the different types of birth control during the first year a couple uses them. These numbers are for couples who use the methods the right way every time they have sex. The failure rates are much higher if you don't use the methods the right way every time.

Is saying "no" really an option?

Yes. The risk of pregnancy or catching an STD may outweigh the pleasure you get from having sex. The only way to make sure you don't get pregnant, get someone pregnant or get an STD is to not have sex at all.

How do spermicides work?

Spermicides help prevent pregnancy by killing sperm. They also help protect against some STDs. Spermicides come as foams, jellies or creams that are put into the vagina. They work best when used with another form of birth control, such as condoms, diaphragms or cervical caps. Some women may develop urinary tract infections with the use of spermicides.

Are condoms a good choice?

Yes. Condoms for men and women help prevent pregnancy and can also help prevent STDs. Condoms are good to use if you or your partner are having sex with other people or if either of you has had sex with other people in the past. The more partners either one of you has had, the more risk one of you may have an STD. Many STDs don't have any warning signs.

Be sure to use condoms made of *latex* (rubber). The AIDS virus can get through condoms made of animal membranes. Don't use lotions or petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) as a lubricant. These can cause the

rubber to break. Use only water-based lubricants (such as K-Y Jelly).

Carefully follow the directions when you use a condom. Condoms work best if you use spermicides along with them. The spermicides should be placed in the vagina (not just on the male condom or in the female condom).

Female condoms aren't as effective as male latex condoms because they're made of plastic. Female condoms should be used when a man can't or won't use a male latex condom.

How do barrier methods work?

Barrier methods cover the *cervix* (the opening of the uterus) to block sperm from getting into the uterus. They also help protect against some STDs. Barrier methods include the *cervical cap* and the *diaphragm*.

The cervical cap and diaphragm require a visit to your doctor to be fitted. They're used along with spermicides. Both must be left in place at least six hours after having sex. The cervical cap can be left in place for up to 72 hours and you don't have to add fresh spermicide each time you have sex. The diaphragm shouldn't be left in place longer than 24 hours and you should add fresh spermicide each time you have sex. The diaphragm may increase your risk of urinary tract infections.



Cervical cap



Diaphragm

What about the IUD?

IUDs are made of flexible plastic. They are put into your uterus by your doctor. It isn't known exactly how IUDs prevent pregnancy. They seem to stop sperm from reaching the egg or prevent the egg from attaching to the uterus.

Some IUDs used in the past were related to serious health problems. Some health risks are still connected with the IUD. You should discuss these with your doctor.

Failure rates when birth control methods are used carefully

Not having sex	0%
Hormone implants	0.04%
Hormone shots	0.04%
Tubal ligation	0.04%
Vasectomy	0.15%
The pill	3%
IUD	3%
Male latex condoms alone*	12%
Diaphragm with spermicide	18%
Cervical cap with spermicide	18%
Rhythm method	20%
Spermicide alone	21%
Chance	85%

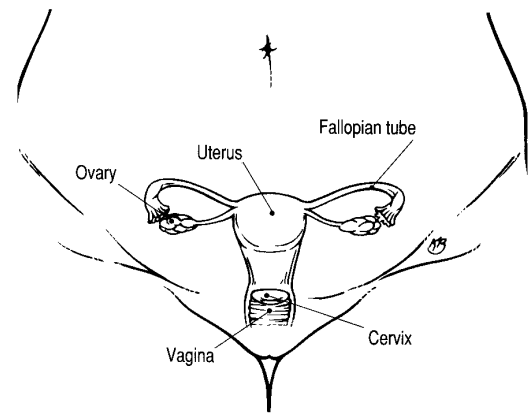
*—Condoms can be made even more effective if they are used with spermicides in the vagina.

The most common side effects of using the IUD include heavier bleeding and stronger cramps during periods. A benefit of the IUD is that you don't have to worry about birth control every day.

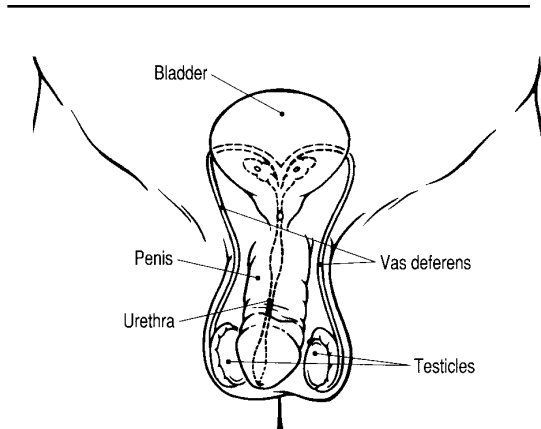
What about being sterilized?

Sterilization is when a man or woman has an operation to prevent pregnancy. If you're sure that you don't want to have children or don't want more children, sterilization is a good choice.

Tubal ligation (getting your "tubes tied") involves closing off the *fallopian tubes* in a woman so that eggs can't reach the uterus. The fallopian tubes are what the eggs travel through to reach the uterus. The picture at right shows the fallopian tubes.



Men are sterilized with *vasectomy*. The man's *vas deferens* (sperm ducts) are closed off so that sperm can't go through. The picture at right shows the vas deferens.



How does the pill work?

Birth control pills work mostly by preventing *ovulation* (the release of an egg by the ovaries). Most pills include two hormones, called *estrogen* and *progestin*.

Birth control pills that were used in the past were stronger than those used now. They had more side effects and were connected with more health problems. Common side effects from birth control pills include nausea, headaches, breast swelling, water retention, weight gain and depression.

The pill may reduce cramping with periods and shorten the number of days of bleeding. It may also improve the regularity of periods, reduce symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and help prevent diseases of

the breast and fallopian tubes, and cancer of the ovaries and of the lining of the uterus.

If you use the pill, you must be able to remember to take it every day. You will need to talk about all of these things with your doctor to decide if you want to try the pill.

What about hormone implants and shots?

Hormone implants (Norplant) and shots (Depo-Provera) work much like the pill, but only the hormone progestin is used.

The implants are capsules that are placed in a woman's upper arm. They help prevent pregnancy for five years before needing to be replaced. But you can have them removed at any time if you want to get pregnant. The shots help prevent pregnancy for three months.

The implants and shots don't have the same health risks as the pill because they don't include estrogen. But they may have some side effects. These include headaches, and changes in your periods, weight and moods. The implant may also cause problems with the area of your arm where the capsules are placed.

A benefit of these methods is that you don't have to think about birth control every day.

What is natural family planning?

Natural family planning requires that a woman learn when in her cycle she is fertile (usually four days before and two days after ovulation) and use another kind of birth control or not have sex during those days.

Several ways are used to keep track of ovulation, including the *calendar method*, the *temperature method* and the *cervical mucus method*. A less effective method of natural family planning is the *rhythm method*. This method involves avoiding sex on certain days of a woman's cycle. All of these methods require much planning. Using more than one at a time may increase how well they work.

Is withdrawal effective?

No. When a man tries to pull out before *ejaculating* ("coming"), he usually leaves behind a small amount of fluid that leaks from the penis during sex. This fluid has enough sperm in it to cause a pregnancy.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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