

Contraception

Contraception is used to prevent pregnancy. It is also called birth control. There are a number of different methods of contraception. Family planning clinics, doctors, nurses and pharmacists can advise you on the different methods of contraception.

Choosing a method

For contraception to be a success, each woman and couple needs to choose the method that suits them best. When choosing a method of contraception consider:

- each partner's cultural and religious beliefs
- each partner's age and abilities
- the woman's health
- the need to protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs)
- each partner's desire for children in the future
- whether the woman is breastfeeding
- how often you have sex
- how effective the method is
- how easy and convenient the method is
- side effects and risks of the method
- other benefits of the method
- cost of the method.



Types of contraception

There are three main methods of contraception – hormone methods, barrier methods and natural methods.

Hormone methods

Hormone methods use oestrogens and progestogens (sex hormones) to change the woman's fertility by:

- thickening mucus (fluid) in the cervix so that sperm cannot enter the uterus (womb)

- preventing ovulation (stopping release of an egg from the ovary)
- changing the lining of the uterus (so that it is not suitable for pregnancy).

Hormones can be very reliable contraceptives when used correctly, but they do not protect against STIs.

All hormone methods of contraception have some health risks and side effects. They can also interact with some medicines.

Hormone contraception must be prescribed by a doctor. Different types of hormone contraceptives are:

- **Oral contraceptive pill (OCP)** – hormone tablets that are taken once a day by the woman. Some OCPs contain both oestrogen and progesterone. They are called combined oral contraceptives (COCs) or 'the pill'. Some OCPs contain only progesterone and are called 'the mini-pill'. A woman may need to try several different oral contraceptives before finding one that suits her.
- **Vaginal ring** (e.g. *NuvaRing*) – a soft plastic ring that releases oestrogen and progesterone slowly over 3 weeks. The woman puts it inside her vagina and leaves it in place for 3 weeks. The ring is then removed, and a new one is put in 1 week later.
- **Progesterone injection** (e.g. *Depo-Provera*, *Depo-Ralovera*) – a progesterone injection. Its effect lasts for 3 months.

- **Progesterone implant** (e.g. *Implanon*) – a small, thin rod that a doctor inserts just under the skin of the woman's upper arm. It releases progesterone slowly over 3 years. It can be removed if the woman is having problems or wants to get pregnant.

- **Progesterone intra-uterine device (IUD)** (e.g. *Mirena*) – a small device inserted into the woman's uterus by a doctor. It releases progesterone slowly over 5 years. It can be removed if the woman is having problems or wants to get pregnant. Hormone-free IUDs are also available (e.g. *Copper T*).

Barrier methods

Barrier methods use a physical barrier to stop sperm reaching the egg.

Condoms are a commonly used barrier method, and are the only method of contraception that can protect against STIs. Condoms are available from pharmacies and other shops without a prescription. Different types of barrier methods are:

- **Male condom** – a thin latex-rubber or plastic sheath that is rolled onto the man's erect penis before sex.
- **Female condom** – a plastic sheath that a woman inserts into her vagina before sex.
- **Diaphragm** – a soft, dome-shaped latex-rubber cap that a woman places over her cervix (inside her vagina). It must be inserted before sex and left in place for at least 6 hours after intercourse. A sexual health professional can work out the correct size diaphragm for the woman.

- **Sterilisation** – a surgical procedure (operation) that is usually permanent. Female sterilisation involves blocking the fallopian tubes that carry eggs from the ovaries to the uterus (e.g. ‘having your tubes tied’). Male sterilisation involves cutting the tubes that carry sperm from the testes into the semen (vasectomy).

Natural methods

Different types of natural methods are:

- **Timing methods** – depend on avoiding sexual intercourse during the woman’s fertile times (e.g. Billings method). It is best to be trained properly in these methods by a sexual health professional.
- **Withdrawal** – the man withdraws his penis from the woman’s vagina before he ejaculates. This is not a reliable method of contraception.

Self care

- Read and follow the product instructions for your contraception.
- Watch out for side effects of hormone contraception (e.g. headache, nausea, sore breasts, acne, mood changes, bloating).
- Don’t smoke. Smoking increases the health risks of hormone contraception.
- Use a water-based lubricant with rubber condoms to reduce the risk of the condom breaking.
- Use a fresh condom each time you have sexual intercourse.
- Use condoms to protect against STIs.

Important

Talk to a sexual health and family planning clinic, a doctor or a pharmacist if:

- you want advice about contraception
- you miss doses of your oral contraceptive pill
- you have side effects from hormone contraception
- your period is missed, irregular or unusual
- you have unprotected sex (e.g. a condom breaks) and want emergency contraception.

Emergency contraceptive pill

A woman can take the emergency contraceptive pill to reduce the risk of getting pregnant after unprotected intercourse. It is also called ‘the morning after pill’. The emergency contraceptive pill is most likely to prevent pregnancy if it is taken as soon as possible after unprotected intercourse. You can get the emergency contraceptive pill from a pharmacist without a prescription.

For more information

Family Planning Alliance Australia

Website: www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au

Jean Hailes for Women's Health

Website: <https://jeanhailes.org.au>

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.gov.au

NPS MedicineWise

Medicines Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets

Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.***

Related Fact Cards

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Your Self Care Pharmacy:

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