

## Women's Birth Control Method Choices

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### Birth control methods for women today

Birth control is an important issue for most women. Being able to control reproductive functioning is a necessary component of career preparation and family growth management. Many methods of contraception are available today. No one contraceptive method is perfect and indeed the best method may be different at different times in a woman's life. There are pros and cons with every method. The best method is one that a woman and her partner feel comfortable using and one that they will use correctly and consistently. The risk for sexually transmitted diseases must also be assessed with contraceptive decision making. There are several contraception methods for birth control, including hormone regulating methods, diaphragms, cervical caps, natural family planning (NFP), intrauterine devices (IUDs and IUSs), injections, implants, emergency contraceptive (the morning-after pill and IUD fitting), contraceptive spermicides and tubal sterilisation. For many women a combination of methods is optimum taking into account the protection she feels she needs.

### The Diaphragm

The diaphragm is a latex or silicone disc that is placed inside the vagina so that it covers the cervix (the entrance to the uterus). Diaphragms block semen from entering the cervix. A spermicide (natural or chemical) is placed into the diaphragm which kills sperm and physically blocks the cervix. Natural substances used for contraception (such as lactic-acid based gels, Aloe Vera and lemon juice, or honey) immobilise sperm but do not necessarily kill it. While the term "natural spermicides" is not technically correct, it is still used for ease of reference and because the contraceptive effect is identical to chemical spermicides. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 87%

The advantages to using a diaphragm include the following:

It is effective (like the mini pill or condoms) and gives you complete control.

When used correctly and consistently, the risk of becoming pregnant is less 2 percent for experienced users

It can be put in several hours before initiation of sexual activity

It contains no hormones, and there are no hormonal side effects

It offers some protection against sexually transmitted infections

The disadvantages include the following:

You must be fitted for the diaphragm by a healthcare professional.

You must use spermicide (chemical or natural)

Insertion may interrupt sex.

You must remember to take it with you on vacations and trips.

It takes practice for some women to insert a diaphragm correctly.

## **The Cervical Cap**

The cervical cap is a dome-shaped device that fits snugly over the cervix. Cervical caps come in many different types. There are three latex re-usable types (Prentif, Vimule and Dumas), one silicone reusable type (Femcap) and one silicone single use disposable type (Oves). The groove on the inside of the cap creates a seal and keeps the cap in place on the cervix together with support of the vaginal wall. Like the diaphragm, the cap is a barrier which blocks passage of sperm from the vagina through the cervix into the uterus and tubes where they can fertilize the ripened egg. Cervical caps are used with a small amount of natural or chemical spermicide. The natural spermicides are lactic acid based, aloe and lemon juice or honey. A Pap smear is required within six months prior to fitting a cervical cap. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 84%

What are the advantages of the cap?

Can be worn for up to 3 days (5 days if used with honey) allowing spontaneous protected sex (continuous regimes are also available)

Is smaller and uses less spermicide than the diaphragm

Can often be worn when a diaphragm doesn't fit well.

Good alternative for women who cannot use the diaphragm due to poor vaginal muscle tone or chronic bladder infections.

It contains no hormones, and there are no hormonal side effects

It can be used with natural spermicides if the user is naturally oriented

Provides some protection against sexually transmitted infections

What are the disadvantages of the cap?

- You must be fitted for a cap by a healthcare professional.
- You must use spermicide (chemical or natural)
- Sometimes more difficult to insert than a diaphragm.
- An odor can occur if worn for over three days without cleaning

## **The female condom**

The female condom is a lubricated polyurethane sheath shaped somewhat like the male condom. The closed end has a flexible ring (like the rim of a small diaphragm) that you insert into the vagina with the open end left on the outside. The female condom prevents semen from getting into the vagina and infections being passed to the outer vaginal area. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 90%

- What are the advantages of the female condom?
- Can be inserted at anytime ahead of intercourse
- Very high level of protection against STD's
- Completely under the female's control
- It contains no hormones, and there are no hormonal side effects

What are the disadvantages of the female condom?

- Takes a little practice to insert
- Some women find it a little cumbersome at first
- Larger than a male condom.

## **Natural Family Planning (NFP)**

Natural family planning or NFP is based on identifying your fertile window and either avoiding intercourse during this window (about 7-10 days) or using a diaphragm, cap or condom during this fertile window. Identifying your fertile window is achieved by keeping a chart of waking body temperature (BBT) and cervical mucus observation (CM). Effectiveness: Method 99% User ? %

Their advantages include the following:

- Totally natural method, no chemicals or side effects
- You get in tune with your bodies natural cycle
- You can use NFP to avoid or plan a pregnancy
- It's as effective as the pill if taught well

The disadvantages include the following:

- You must be trained by a certified NFP instructor
- It takes three to six cycles to learn effectively
- You have to keep a daily record.
- Women with very irregular cycles may have very long phases that have to be regarded as fertile
- No protection against STD's.

## **The combined oral contraceptive pill**

Birth control pills, also called combined oral contraceptives, are pills that contain two synthetic hormones, an oestrogen and a progestin. They prevent pregnancy by stopping ovulation and by making the lining of the uterus thinner. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 92%

Their advantages include the following:

- They decrease risk of cancer of the ovary and cancer of the lining of the uterus.
- They may decrease menstrual cramping and pain.
- They can reduce menstrual flow and the risk of anemia.
- You have less concern with getting pregnant.

The disadvantages include the following:

- There are long term health effects

You must remember to take them daily.

You may have nausea or spotting (or both) during the first month.

Side effects can include headaches, depression or decreased libido.

You often will put on weight

They provide no protection against sexually transmitted infections

### **The progesterone only contraceptive pill**

The "mini-pill" is a progestin-only pill. Mini-pills work by thickening the cervical mucus, so sperm cannot reach the egg and by making the lining of the uterus thinner. They sometimes stop ovulation occasionally. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 92%

The advantages include the following:

There are no oestrogen side effects (weight gain, depression, loss of libido).

They can be taken by women who have had side effects from oestrogen pills.

The amount of progestin in the mini-pill is less than in the combined pill.

Nursing mothers can take them.

The disadvantages include the following:

They usually cause menstrual cycle irregularity.

You may have shorter periods and scant flow.

You must take a pill daily at the same time within an hour.

They offer no protection against sexually transmitted infections.

### **The Vaginal Ring (Nuvaring)**

The ring (brand name: NuvaRing) is a small, bendable ring that you insert into your vagina. You leave it in place for three weeks at a time, then take it out for the fourth week. The ring works by releasing two hormones (etonogestrel/ethinyl estradiol) similar to the combined contraceptive pill that prevent your ovaries from releasing eggs. The hormones also thicken your cervical mucus, which helps to block sperm from getting to your egg. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 95%

The advantages include the following:

- It has all the advantages of the Pill minus the disadvantage of daily dosing

- It contains a lower dose of estrogen and progestin than the Pill, so it tends to have fewer systemic side effects (e.g., headaches, breast tenderness) than the Pill.

The disadvantages include the following:

- You must be comfortable touching her vagina to insert it

- You must remember to remove and replace it at the right time in your cycle

- Some women experience thrush more often than usual

## **The Intrauterine Device (IUD)**

The copper IUD is inserted into the uterus and prevents implantation of a fertilized egg. Once inserted, the IUD can be used for up to 10 years as a very effective contraceptive. You do need to be ok with a method that allows fertilisation but prevents implantation. Effectiveness: Method 99%

The advantages of using an IUD include the following:

- You will not experience any hormonal side effects.

- Once it is in place, you can forget about it.

- There is no further cost after the initial fitting cost.

- There are now a range of sizes to ensure the correct fit under ultrasound guidance

The disadvantages include the following:

- It is often painful to insert and causes uterine bleeding

- You may have post fitting cramping or pain.

- You will usually experience heavier periods.

- It offers no protection against sexually transmitted infections.

- It is available only with a prescription and must be inserted by a healthcare provider.

## **The Intrauterine System (Mirena or Jaydess)**

The IUS is inserted into the uterus and releases a small amount of progestin each day similar in amount to the mini-pill. This hormone thickens your cervical mucus and prevents sperm entering your uterus. It also thins the lining of the uterus impeding implantation. Once inserted, the IUS can be used for up to 5 years as an effective contraceptive. Effectiveness: Method 99%

The advantages of using an IUS include the following:

- There are no oestrogen side effects (weight gain, depression, loss of libido).
- It can be used by women who have had side effects from oestrogen pills and implants.
- Once it is in place, you can forget about it
- There is no further cost after the initial fitting cost.
- There are now two sizes to ensure the correct fit under ultrasound guidance

The disadvantages include the following:

- It is often painful to insert and causes uterine bleeding
- You may have post fitting cramping or pain for a few days.
- It usually causes menstrual irregularity.
- You will have shorter periods and scant flow after a few cycles
- It often causes emotional hormonal disturbances
- It offers no protection against sexually transmitted infections.
- It is available only with a prescription and must be inserted by a healthcare provider.

## **Birth Control Injections (Provera)**

The Injections are commonly called "depo" They contain a synthetic hormone much like the progesterone a woman produces during the last two weeks of each monthly cycle. The hormone stops the release of an egg and provides other contraceptive effects. Effectiveness: Method 97%

The advantages of the birth control shot include the following:

- Nothing must be taken daily or used at the time of sexual intercourse.

They are extremely effective.

The monthly menstrual flow is lessened (or eliminated), as is cramping.

It provides complete privacy, in that nobody must know you're using birth control.

The disadvantages include the following:

These shots often lead to irregular or absent periods.

Most women gain weight and experience low libido

The shots offer no protection against sexually transmitted infections.

You must return to your healthcare provider every three months for an injection.

## **Birth Control Implants (Nexplanon)**

Implants are small, thin and flexible arm implant that provides up to 3 years of continuous birth control and are inserted under the skin on the inner surface of your upper arm. They contain a synthetic hormone (etonogestrel) much like the progesterone a woman produces during the last two weeks of each monthly cycle. The hormone stops the release of an egg and provides other contraceptive effects. Effectiveness: Method 99%

The advantages of the birth control implant include the following:

Long-term method of birth control (protects against pregnancy from 24 hours after insertion, for up to 3 years after insertion)

Can remove whenever you want to or can wait for 3 years to remove

Very effective against pregnancy

May cause light or no menstrual periods

The disadvantages include the following:

No protection against sexually transmitted diseases

The disadvantages of the birth control implant include the following

Requires minor surgery and insertion of the tiny rod underneath the skin

Requires minor surgery to remove spent capsule

Can cause side effects such as irregular menstrual periods, depression, nervousness, hair loss, and weight gain

Could have pain or infection at area where capsules implanted

## Male Condoms

Male condoms are a very common form of birth control and are made of latex, plastic or natural membranes. They work by preventing body fluids from mixing during intercourse. If used consistently and correctly, they prevent pregnancy about 97 percent of the time. Effectiveness: Method 98% User 80%

The advantages of using of condoms include the following:

- They are safe and effective at preventing both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- They come in a variety of colours, sizes and styles and can make sex more interesting.
- They can be used at the last minute for unplanned intercourse

The disadvantages include the following:

- Sex must be interrupted while the condom is put on the penis.
- Care must be taken to avoid tearing the condom.
- You cannot use oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline or whipped cream.
- Some people are sensitive or allergic to latex or find the smell unpleasant.

## Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception is available in two forms. For 72 hours after unprotected sex, you can take emergency contraceptive pills to avoid becoming pregnant or for up to seven days after unprotected sex, you can also have a copper IUD fitted which can be left in place to provide long term contraception or removed in your next menstrual cycle. Effectiveness: Method 80%

The advantages of the include the following:

They prevent unwanted pregnancies after unprotected sex.

Women who can't take regular birth control pills can still use the ECs.

The copper IUD can be left in place for long term contraception

They prevent abortions and cost less than an abortion.

The disadvantages include the following:

The ECP cause nausea in about 50 percent of women.

A test must be taken to eliminate STD's from the unprotected intercourse

EC is not 100% effective

## **Female Sterilisation**

Sterilisation of a female is carried out by an operation (laparoscopic tubal sterilisation) that blocks the woman's fallopian tubes, preventing sperm and eggs from meeting. It is the most common form of birth control worldwide. Effectiveness: Method 99%

The advantages include the following:

It is an extremely effective method of birth control

The operation is fairly simple and safe

Nothing needs to be taken daily or used at the time of sexual intercourse.

It does not affect your sex drive, emotions or ability to enjoy sex

The disadvantages include the following:

It requires general anaesthetic and discomfort for several weeks after the operation

It is almost impossible to reverse this operation

It offers no protection against sexually transmitted infections

Some women experience long term chronic pelvic pain



## When To See a Healthcare Provider

In general, your contraceptive healthcare provider should be consulted any time that there is pain during intercourse or any unusual bleeding, spotting, discharge, or odour. Any burning or itching associated with spermicide use may be an indication of an allergy to the agent. A healthcare provider should be consulted in the event of toxic shock syndrome symptoms. With a diaphragm or cap, it is wise to be checked any time that the diaphragm or cap does not seem to be fitting properly or there is discomfort, pain, or recurring bladder infections or after gaining or losing 7 lbs in weight. After having a baby, it is usually necessary to be refitted for a different sized diaphragm or cap because vaginal depth, cervical size/shape and muscle tone are usually altered by full-term pregnancy.

## Our Female Healthcare Philosophy

At the Women's Natural Health Clinic, we specialise in providing comprehensive natural reproductive, gynaecological, obstetric and general healthcare for females from adolescence to post-menopause. Our approach is to integrate techniques in both oriental and western medical diagnosis to formulate a naturally oriented treatment plan combining acupuncture, herbal medicine, naturopathic medicine, nutritional therapy, exercise and lifestyle. Each treatment plan is tailored specifically to each individual woman maximizing results.

Please email us at [enquiries@naturalgynae.com](mailto:enquiries@naturalgynae.com) with questions, we are more than happy to provide any information via email that will assist you in deciding which treatment approach would be best for you

For more information, contact details and appointments click here [www.naturalgynae.com](http://www.naturalgynae.com)