Choosing a Birth Control Method

Many birth control methods are available. This guide lists the major types that are not permanent. **The list runs from the most effective to the least effective.** Only male and female condoms protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

These methods of birth control result in less than 1 pregnancy per 100 women in a year

The **implant** is a match stick sized plastic rod that is placed under the skin in the arm by your healthcare provider. It protects against pregnancy for up to 3 years.

- **Advantage:** You do not need to take anything every day or do anything before, during, or after sex. Your periods may be lighter and less painful, or you may have no period.
- **Disadvantage:** You may have irregular bleeding or spotting.

The **hormonal IUD** is a small, T-shaped piece of plastic that is placed in the uterus (womb) by your healthcare provider. It protects against pregnancy for up to 5 years.

- **Advantage:** You do not need to take anything every day or do anything before, during, or after sex. You should check now and then that the string from the IUD is still in place. You will be instructed how to do this. Your period may be lighter and less painful, or you may have no period.
- **Disadvantage:** You may have irregular bleeding or spotting. This often improves after a few months.

The **copper IUD** is a small, T-shaped piece of plastic that is placed in the uterus (womb) by your healthcare provider. It protects against pregnancy for up to 10 years.

- **Advantage:** You do not need to take anything every day or do anything before, during, or after sex. You should check now and then that the string from the IUD is still in place. You will be instructed how to do this.
- **Disadvantage:** You may have heavier bleeding or cramping. This sometimes improves after a few months.
These methods of birth control result in 6 to 12 pregnancies per 100 women in a year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth control shot (Depo-Provera)</td>
<td>Is given in the arm or buttocks by a healthcare provider every 3 months.</td>
<td><strong>Advantage</strong>: You do not need to take anything every day or do anything before, during, or after sex. You may have no period.</td>
<td><strong>Disadvantage</strong>: You may have irregular bleeding or spotting. This often improves after a few months.</td>
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<td>Oral contraceptives (birth control pills)</td>
<td>Contain hormones that prevent pregnancy. You need to swallow a pill at about the same time every day.</td>
<td><strong>Advantage</strong>: Your period may be lighter and less painful.</td>
<td><strong>Disadvantage</strong>: It can be hard to remember to take a pill every day and get prescription refills on time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patch (Ortho Evra)</td>
<td>Applied to the skin like a band-aid each week for 3 weeks and then removed for 1 week to allow for a period.</td>
<td><strong>Advantage</strong>: Your period may be lighter and less painful.</td>
<td><strong>Disadvantage</strong>: The patch may be less effective if you are overweight. It may be hard to keep the patch in place or to change it on time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vaginal ring (NuvaRing)</td>
<td>Is a small, flexible ring that is inserted into the vagina to stay in place for 3 weeks. It is then removed for 1 week to allow for a period.</td>
<td><strong>Advantage</strong>: Your period may be lighter and less painful.</td>
<td><strong>Disadvantage</strong>: It may be hard to keep the ring in place or to change it on time.</td>
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<td>Diaphragm</td>
<td>A dome-shaped silicone device that is inserted into the vagina before sex and removed 8 hours after sex. A spermicide foam, gel, or cream needs to be used with the diaphragm each time you have sex.</td>
<td><strong>Disadvantage</strong>: You need to have the diaphragm and spermicide available and use it correctly each time you have sex.</td>
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These methods of birth control result in 18 or more pregnancies per 100 women in a year

A male or female condom is placed over the penis (male condom) or inserted into the vagina (female condom). The condom blocks the sperms’ movement into the uterus (womb).

- **Advantage:** Both the male and female condom are easy to use and you can buy them over the counter. It is the only birth control method that can protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- **Disadvantage:** The condom may leak, break, or have holes. You need to have a condom available and use it correctly each time you have sex.

The sponge is a dome-shaped sponge that gets inserted into the vagina before sex and removed 6 hours after sex.

- **Advantage:** The sponge is easy to use and you can buy it over the counter.
- **Disadvantage:** You need to have a sponge available and use it correctly each time you have sex.

Emergency contraception pills

These pills can prevent pregnancy up to 5 days after unprotected intercourse. The pills delay ovulation or the release of an egg during the menstrual cycle. Emergency contraception does not affect a pregnancy that has already started. The pills are available in pharmacies and other stores without a prescription. They are not recommended as a regular method of birth control. Talk to your healthcare provider for more information.

Natural family planning

Birth control without the use of chemicals (vaginal spermicide or oral contraceptives) or barriers (condoms or diaphragms) is called natural family planning. You need to have regular menstrual cycles (periods) to use natural family planning. It uses body temperature, vaginal discharge, or a calendar of your menstrual cycle to find out which days of each month you are most likely to ovulate or release an egg and get pregnant. You should not have sex during this time. It requires couples to not have sex for a large number of days each month. When used correctly, natural family planning is about 75% effective. Talk to your healthcare provider for more information.