

A woman with long, dark, curly hair is lying on her back on a bed with white linens. She is smiling and looking upwards. Her hands are resting on her abdomen. The lighting is soft and blue-toned.

“Which is the best birth control method for me...”

Over the last few years new birth control methods have been released and now the choice is larger than ever before. Choosing a birth control method may be confusing. Since not all methods are suitable for all patients.

Before choosing a birth control method several issues must be considered :

- *Health status and habits*
- *Age*
- *Effectiveness*
- *Cost*
- *Side effects*
- *Number of partners and frequency of intercourse*

Which are the different birth control methods available?

• Periodic Abstinence

Consists in avoiding sexual intercourse during the fertile days of the cycle. Keep in mind that to practice this method, you need to learn about your menstrual cycle (or how often you get your period). You keep a written record of when you get your period, what it is like and how you feel (sore breasts, cramps). You also check your cervical mucus and take your basal body temperature daily, and record these in a chart. This is how you learn to predict, or tell, which days you are fertile or “unsafe.” This method is about 75% effective at preventing pregnancy.

• Withdrawal method

Withdrawal is not an effective birth control method. It works much better when a male condom is used. Withdrawal refers to when a man takes his penis out of a woman’s vagina before he ejaculates. This stops the sperm from going

to the egg. When you use withdrawal, you can also be at risk for getting pregnant before the man pulls out. When a man’s penis first becomes erect, there can be fluid on the tip of the penis that has sperm in it. This sperm can get a woman pregnant. Withdrawal also does not protect you from STDs or HIV

• The Male Condom

Condoms are called barrier methods of birth control because they put up a block, or barrier, which keeps the sperm from reaching the egg. Only latex or polyurethane (because some people are allergic to latex) condoms are proven to help protect against STDs, including HIV. Male condoms are 86 to 98% effective at preventing pregnancy.



• Oral Contraceptives

Also called “the pill,” it contains the hormones estrogen and progestin. A pill is taken daily to block the release of eggs from the ovaries. It also lightens the flow of your period and protects against pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), ovarian cancer, and endometrial cancer. It does not protect against STDs or HIV. The pill may add to your risk of heart disease, including high blood pressure, blood clots, and blockage of the arteries. If you are over age 35 and smoke, or have a history of blood clots or breast or en-

dometrial cancer. The pill is 95 to 99.9% effective at preventing pregnancy if used correctly.

• The Mini-Pill

Unlike the pill, the mini-pill only has one hormone, progestin, instead of both estrogen and progestin. Taken daily, the mini-pill reduces and thickens cervical mucus to prevent sperm from reaching the egg. It also prevents a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterus (womb). The mini-pill also can decrease the flow of your period and protect against PID and ovarian and endometrial cancer. Mothers who breastfeed can use it because it will not affect their milk supply. The mini-pill is a good option for women who can’t take estrogen or for women who have a risk of blood clots. The mini-pill does not protect against STDs or HIV. Mini-pills are 95 to 99.9% effective at preventing pregnancy if used correctly.

• Copper T IUD (Intrauterine Device)

An IUD is a small device that is shaped in the form of a “T.” Your doctor places it inside the uterus. The arms of the Copper T IUD contain some copper, which stops fertilization by preventing sperm from making their way up through the uterus into the fallopian tubes. If fertilization does occur, the IUD would prevent the fertilized egg from implanting in the lining of the uterus. The Copper T IUD can stay in your uterus for up to 5 years. It does not protect against STDs or HIV. This IUD is 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

• Intrauterine System or IUS

(Mirena) - The IUS is a small T-shaped device like the IUD and is placed inside the uterus by a health care provider. It releases a small amount of a hormone each day to keep you from getting pregnant.



The IUS stays in your uterus for up to five years. It does not protect against STDs or HIV. The IUS is 99% effective.

• The Female Condom

Worn by the woman, this barrier method keeps sperm from getting into her body. It is made of polyurethane, is packaged with a lubricant, and may protect against STDs, including HIV. It can be inserted up to 8 hours prior to sexual intercourse. Female condoms are 79 to 95% effective at preventing pregnancy.

• Implant

Consists of small stick-like device, that is placed under the skin. The implant releases a very low, steady level of a hormone that prevents pregnancy for up to 3 years. However, the implant can be taken out at any time and you then can become pregnant. This method is 99.9% effective at preventing pregnancy. It does not protect against STDs or HIV.

• Diaphragm or Cervical Cap

These are barrier methods of birth control, where the sperm are blocked from reaching the egg. The diaphragm is shaped like a shallow latex cup. The cervical cap is a thimble-shaped latex cup. Both come in different sizes and you need a health care provider to “fit” you for one. Before sexual intercourse, you use them with spermicide (to block or kill sperm) and place them up inside your vagina to cover your cervix (the opening to your womb). You can buy spermicide gel or foam at a drug store. Some women can be sensitive to nonoxynol-9 and need to use spermicides that do not contain it. The diaphragm is 80 to 94% effective at preventing pregnancy. The cervical cap is 80 to 90% effective at preventing pregnancy for women who have not had a child, and 60 to 80% for women who have had a child.



• The Patch (Evra)

This is a skin patch worn on the lower abdomen, buttocks, or upper body. It releases the hormones progestin and estrogen into the bloodstream. You put on a new patch once a week for three weeks, then do not wear a patch during the fourth week in order to have a menstrual period. The patch is 99% effective at preventing pregnancy, but appears to be less effective in women who weigh more than 198 pounds. It does not protect against STDs or HIV.



• The Hormonal Vaginal Contraceptive Ring (NuvaRing)

The NuvaRing is a ring that releases the hormones progestin and estrogen. You squeeze the ring between your thumb and index finger and insert it into your vagina. You wear the ring for three weeks, take it out for the week that you have your period, and then put in a new ring. The ring is 98 to 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

- **Surgical Sterilization** (Tubal Ligation or Vasectomy)

These surgical methods are meant for people who want a permanent method of birth control. In other words, they never want to have a child or they do not want more children. Tubal ligation or “tying tubes” is done on the woman to stop eggs from going down to her uterus where they can be fertilized. The man has a vasectomy to keep sperm from going to his penis, so his ejaculate never has any sperm in it. They are 99 to 99.5% effective at preventing pregnancy.

- **Nonsurgical Sterilization** (Essure Permanent Birth Control System)

A thin tube is used to thread a tiny spring-like device through the vagina and uterus into each fallopian tube. Flexible coils temporarily anchor it inside the fallopian tube. A Dacron-like mesh material embedded in the coils irritates the fallopian tubes’ lining to cause scar tissue to grow and eventually permanently plug the tubes. It can take about three months for the scar tissue to grow, so it is important to use another form of birth control during this time. Then you will have to return to your health care provider for a test to see if scar tissue has fully blocked your tubes. In studies of more than 600 women, followed for a year, there so far have been no pregnancies in those whose Essure devices were implanted successfully.

- **Emergency Contraception**

This is NOT a regular method of birth control and should never be used as one. Emergency contraception, or emergency birth control, is used to keep a woman from getting pregnant when she has had unprotected vaginal intercourse. “Unprotected” can mean that no method of birth control was used. It can also mean that a birth control method was used but did not work - like a condom breaking. Or, a woman may have forgotten to take her birth control pills, or may have been abused or forced to have sex when she did not want to. Emergency contraception consists of taking two doses of hormonal pills taken 12 hours apart and started within three days after having unprotected sex. These are sometimes wrongly called the “morning after pill.” The pills are 75 to 89% effective at preventing pregnancy

