

CONTRACEPTION – YOUR CHOICES

If you're having sex and you don't want to get pregnant, you need to use contraception. Contraception is also called birth control or family planning.

Every month your ovaries produce an egg. The semen that is released when a man ejaculates contains millions of sperm. It takes only one of these sperm to fertilise one of your eggs to begin a pregnancy. Using contraception reduces your risk of getting pregnant when you have sex.

Choosing your contraception

This factsheet gives an overview of the methods of contraception available in Australia. To find the best one for you, speak with a doctor or nurse.

Long acting reversible contraception (LARC) is available and gives safe, effective contraception over a number of years, depending on the type.

For more on each contraception method see our other fact sheets on the Women's and Family Planning Victoria's websites.

Contraceptive implant

A contraceptive implant is a LARC. It is a small plastic rod that is placed under the skin of your upper arm. It slowly releases a low dose of the hormone progesterone, which stops your ovaries releasing an egg each month. You will notice a change to your period or it may stop altogether. The implant will last for three years and is an excellent method of preventing pregnancy. It can easily be removed and won't stop you from getting pregnant later on.

Intra uterine device (IUD)

An IUD is a small contraceptive device that is placed in your uterus. An IUD is also a LARC. There are two kinds of IUD:

- » copper IUD (Cu-IUD) – lasts for 5 to 10 years
- » hormone-releasing IUD – lasts for 5 years.

An IUD stops sperm from reaching and fertilising an egg. It also changes the lining of your uterus so a fertilised egg won't stick to it.

An IUD can be easily removed by a doctor or nurse and won't stop you from getting pregnant later on.

The copper IUD may make your periods heavier and the progesterone IUD will make your periods lighter or stop them completely.

Oral contraceptive pills

There are two main types of contraceptive pills that must be swallowed every day.

The combined oral contraceptive pill (COC)

The COC has two hormones (oestrogen and progesterone) that stop the ovaries releasing an egg each month and thickens the mucus in your cervix. The COC may also reduce acne and menstrual bleeding and pain. The combined pill is very good at preventing pregnancy when used correctly.

The progesterone-only pill (mini pill or POP)

This pill has only one hormone and works by changing the mucus at the entrance to the uterus so that sperm cannot pass through to fertilise the egg.

The POP is different to the COC because it doesn't stop you ovulating (releasing an egg). The POP is very good at preventing pregnancy when used correctly.

Emergency contraceptive pill

(Sometimes called the 'morning-after pill')

If you had sex without contraception, or you had trouble using your regular method (missed pills or broken condom), you can take an emergency pill to prevent pregnancy.

Emergency contraceptive pills are best taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex, ideally within 24 hours (1 day), but still work well within 96 hours (4 days). You can take ECP within 96 to 120 hours (5 days) after having unprotected sex, but it won't be very effective. The emergency pill is available from the chemist with no prescription.

Vaginal ring

The vaginal ring is a soft plastic ring that is inserted into the vagina. It slowly releases low doses of two hormones, oestrogen and progesterone that are absorbed into your body. It works in a similar way to the COC to prevent pregnancy. The vaginal ring is inserted for three weeks. You remove it for one week to have your regular period. After the week without the ring, you insert a new one.

Contraceptive injection

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA) is a long-acting progesterone hormone that is given as an injection every 12 weeks.

Male condom

The male condom is a fine rubber or synthetic sheath that is worn on an erect penis. It collects the sperm and stops them entering your vagina and uterus. You can buy condoms from a chemist or supermarket. Condoms reduce the risk of both pregnancy and STIs. Condoms are effective if they are used correctly. If they are not used correctly, which is common, you have a significant risk of getting pregnant or catching an STI.

Female condom

A latex-free female condom is also available. It fits loosely in your vagina and stops sperm from entering your uterus. A soft removable ring helps to insert it as well as keeping it in place. A large flexible ring stays on the outside of the vagina covering the vulva (outside of the vagina). If used correctly, the female condom reduces the risk of both pregnancy and STI. It is more expensive and less readily available than the male condom.

Diaphragm

A diaphragm is a soft silicone cap worn inside the vagina to cover the entrance to the uterus (the cervix). It stops the sperm from getting into the uterus. A diaphragm can be used over and over again. You must insert the diaphragm before having sex (up to six hours before) and remove it after six hours.

Natural methods of contraception

Natural methods of contraception include the calendar (rhythm) method, cervical mucus method, temperature method or a combination of these methods. These methods help you identify the days you are fertile. Avoiding sex on these days can prevent pregnancy. These methods take practice before you can use them accurately and are best when your periods are regular.

Withdrawal

This is when the man takes his penis out of your vagina before he ejaculates and sperm is released. This doesn't work if he forgets to withdraw his penis or is not quick enough. Also there may be some sperm in the pre-ejaculate (fluid that comes out of his penis before he ejaculates). If he ejaculates at the entrance to your vagina some sperm may still get in and you could get pregnant.

Sterilisation

Both men and women can have a simple operation to make them sterile. The operations are permanent. You would only have these operations if you don't want any more children.

For women, the operation involves blocking the fallopian tubes to stop the egg travelling from your ovaries to your uterus. There is also a procedure where tiny inserts are placed inside your fallopian tubes. This procedure can be done through the vagina and can be done while you are awake.

How effective is each type of contraception?

| 99%+ | 91%+ | 76%+ |
|--|--|--|
| Most effective. Less than 1 pregnancy per 100 women in one year | 6 to 9 pregnancies per 100 women in one year | 18 or more pregnancies per 100 women in one year |
| Contraceptive implant | Contraceptive injection | Male condom |
| Copper or progestogen IUD | Vaginal ring | Diaphragm |
| Sterilisation | Combined pill or COC | Natural methods |
| | Progestogen-only pill or POP | Withdrawal |

Did you know?

- » You have the right to access contraception and control your fertility.
- » You can choose to use contraception that is temporary and reversible.
- » There are methods of contraception that do not have to involve your partner.
- » Some contraception is available relatively cheaply from some providers.
- » Most women who use contraception have little trouble with side effects.
- » There are types of contraception that you don't have to remember to use every day. They can last from three to ten years. They are called LARCs or Long Acting Reversible Contraception.

A condom is always a good idea

No matter what contraception you choose, using a condom is the only way to protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

One of the most common STIs in Australia is chlamydia. Chlamydia can lead to infertility if left untreated. Using a condom every time you have sex is your best protection against HIV/AIDS and other STIs. **Other contraception will not protect you against sexually transmitted infections.**

Where to get more information

- » Your local doctor (GP)
- » Your local chemist/pharmacist
- » Nurse on Call – 1300 60 60 24
- » Family Planning Victoria
Tel: 03 9257 0100 or 1800 013 952 (freecall)
Web: www.fpv.org.au
- » Women's Welcome Centre (Victoria only)
Royal Women's Hospital
Tel: (03) 8345 3037 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)
Email: wwcadmin@thewomens.org.au
- » Women's Medicines Information Service Tel: (03) 8345 3190
Email: drug.information@thewomens.org.au

Related fact sheets

- » Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC)
- » The Contraceptive Pill
- » Emergency Contraception