

# Contraceptive Implants

The Royal Women's Hospital Fact Sheet / [www.thewomens.org.au](http://www.thewomens.org.au)



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## If you don't want to get pregnant, you need to use contraception.

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.

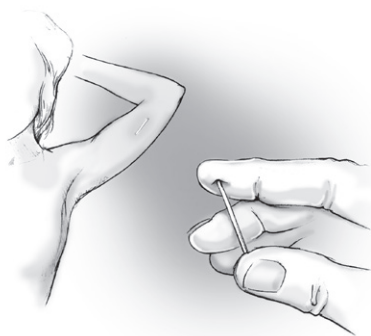
**No matter what contraception you choose, you still need a condom to protect you from sexually transmitted infections.**

In Australia, there are more than 20,000 new sexually transmitted infections every year. One of the most common is chlamydia, which can lead to infertility if left untreated. A condom is your best protection against infections. If you use a condom with a water-based lubricant every time you have sex you will have less chance of getting HIV/AIDS and many other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## What is the contraceptive implant?

Contraceptive implants work in a similar way to contraceptive pills. The implant, a small thin flexible rod, contains a hormone that helps to prevent pregnancy. It is 4cm long and made of plastic and is inserted just under the skin on the inside of the arm. This must be done by a doctor or nurse who is familiar with the technique.

The implant steadily releases a small amount of hormone. This helps to prevent pregnancy for three years. The implant must be removed at the end of three years. However, it can be taken out at any time by a doctor or nurse familiar with the removal technique.



## How does the implant work?

The implant prevents pregnancy by:

- stopping a woman's ovaries from making an egg each month
- thickening the mucus that women have in their cervix (entrance to the womb). This makes it hard for sperm to get through and fertilise an egg.

## How effective is it?

The contraceptive implant is more than 99.8 per cent effective in preventing pregnancy. But, remember that no contraceptive is 100 per cent reliable; statistics show that 1 in 20 women (five per cent) may still get pregnant.

## What are the advantages?

- Effective contraception for three years.
- You don't have to remember to use contraception every day.
- Doesn't interfere with sexual intercourse.
- Low cost.

## What are the disadvantages?

- Women using implants have changes to their periods. Most women have less bleeding than before the implant, but some have more frequent or longer periods.
- Some women have side effects that may include headaches and acne.

## What about fertility?

The contraceptive implant doesn't interfere with fertility once it's removed – periods usually return to normal within one month.

## Can you see or feel the implant?

You can't see the implant – it's hidden under your skin. But you can feel it by touching the place on the arm where the implant is.

## Who might choose to use the contraceptive implant?

A woman who:

- wants effective, long lasting and reversible contraception
- is willing to accept changes to her menstrual cycle.

The implant may be especially suitable if you:

- have difficulty remembering to take birth control pills
- don't like other contraceptive methods or find them unreliable
- can't take the hormone oestrogen.

The implant is one of many different contraceptives. Talk to your health practitioner about the choices available and the one that suits you best.

## Who may not be able to use the implant?

It may not be suitable if you:

- have severe liver disease
- have unusual vaginal bleeding
- take medication that makes the implant less effective
- have blood clots in your legs or lungs
- can't take the hormone progesterone.

## How is the implant put in and taken out?

The implant is put in under a local anaesthetic. This takes about one minute. Removing the implant is also done under local anaesthetic, and with a small incision. This may leave a very small scar. The insertion and removal of the implant must be done by a doctor or nurse who is familiar with these techniques. After insertion, you should be able to feel but not see the implant. If you can't feel it, see your doctor. Use a back-up method of contraception until the doctor tells you the implant is still in place.

## Will it hurt?

Using an implant doesn't hurt. There may be some bruising and tenderness after having it put in or removed. This may last for up to a week. Wearing a bandage over the arm for 24 hours helps reduce bruising and tenderness. The area may itch slightly for a few days. It's important to avoid rubbing the skin over the implant.

## Where to get more information

- Your local doctor (GP)
- Your local pharmacist
- Nurse on Call – 1300 60 60 24
- **Women's Health Information Centre** (Victoria only)  
Royal Women's Hospital  
Tel: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)  
Email: whic@thewomens.org.au

## Related fact sheets

- Contraception – Your Choices
- Condoms & Diaphragms
- The Pill
- Depo Provera – a contraceptive injection
- Intra Uterine Device (IUD)

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