



Women's Health Coordination Center at Griffin Hospital
www.vwhcc.org • info@vwhcc.org • Tel: 203.732.1330

Selecting the birth control method that's right for you

Many factors should be taken into account when choosing a method of birth control. You need to consider your health, age, frequency of intercourse, number of partners, and desire to get pregnant in the future.

The Pill

The pill is available in two formulations: combined oral contraceptives (COC) that contain both estrogen and progestin, and progestin only pills (POP). COCs are considered safe for most women, however those who smoke and are over 35 or who have a significant family history of cardiovascular disease should not take this kind of pill. Side effects can include nausea, headache, breast tenderness, weight gain, irregular bleeding, and depression. These symptoms may subside after being on the pill for a few months. POPs contain no estrogen, so women who take these pills do not have the same risk of blood clots that those who take COCs have. This pill is a good method for women who cannot take estrogen because they are breast feeding or because of headaches or high blood pressure associated with estrogen. The progestin only pill may cause menstrual changes, weight gain, and breast tenderness.

Depo-Provera

Depo-Provera is given as a shot by a healthcare provider every three months. It is similar to the progestin only pills and has comparable benefits and side effects. The advantage of Depo-Provera is that you don't need to remember to take it every day. However, you must get your shots on time. Postponing your shot even a week can increase your chance of getting pregnant.

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception prevents pregnancy within a few hours or days of unprotected sex by taking combined oral contraceptives, progestin only pills, or inserting an IUD. This is not to be used as a regular form of birth control, rather it is for emergency use only.

Interuterine Devices (IUD)

The new IUDs have one of the lowest failure rates of any contraceptive method. An IUD is a T-shaped device that is inserted into the uterus by a healthcare professional. There are two types of IUDs, one protects against pregnancy for 10 years and the other must be replaced every year. The IUD is a good choice for those in long term monogamous relationships who are not at high risk for sexually transmitted diseases.

New Hormonal Contraceptives

In addition to the Pill, Depo, and IUD several new hormonal contraceptives are becoming available in the US. The Vaginal Ring and Transdermal Patch are two that have recently received FDA approval. The Ring is inserted into the vagina and is worn for 3 weeks and then removed for one week. The Patch delivers the same hormones as the Pill through the skin. One patch is worn per week for 3 consecutive weeks, followed by 1-week patch-free. Side effects are similar to the pill but these methods don't require remembering to take a pill everyday at the same time.

Condoms

Condoms are a barrier method of contraception. Anyone who is not in a long term monogamous relationship should use a condom in addition to any other methods of contraception as condoms help protect against sexually transmitted infections. Oil-based lubricants (petroleum jelly, lotions, or baby oil) should never be used with latex or lambskin condoms as they can weaken the material. Today, individuals can choose between regular male condoms or the female condom. The female condom is shaped similar to the male condom. The closed end has a flexible ring that is inserted into the vagina, up to 8 hours before sexual intercourse, while the open end remains partly outside the vagina. The female condom should never be used at the same time your partner is using a male condom. Condoms, whether male or female, should be used one-time only and never be reused.

Diaphragm and Cervical Cap

The diaphragm is available by prescription from a health care professional. It is sized to fit your body, and works by covering the cervix with a dome-shaped rubber disk to prevent sperm from entering the uterus. Spermicide is applied to the diaphragm before insertion to kill sperm. The diaphragm may be left in place for 6 hours, however for repeated sexual intercourse or intercourse after 6 hours spermicide should be inserted into the vagina while the diaphragm is still in place. Diaphragms should never be left in for more than 24 hours due to risk of toxic shock syndrome (TSS). The cervical cap protects against pregnancy for 48 hours and for multiple acts of sexual intercourse during this time. Prolonged use (over 48 hours) may increase the risk of toxic shock syndrome and can produce a foul odor or discharge.

The Sponge

The Sponge releases spermicidal gel over the vaginal mucus and forms a barrier to kill the sperm before they can reach the cervix. It can be inserted several hours before intercourse and can be left in up to 12 hours after sex. It does not need to be replaced if sexual intercourse is repeated. Women who are allergic to nonoxyl-9 spermicide or who have had toxic shock syndrome should not use the sponge.

Surgical Sterilization

If you are sure that you do not want to become pregnant in the future you or your partner may choose surgical sterilization. Male sterilization is performed by cutting a small piece out of the sperm ducts. The sperm-cells, which are produced in the testicles, can no longer be transported to the seminal vesicles. This is a minor procedure and can be done in an outpatient department with only a local anesthetic. Sterilization in women is done by cutting or blocking the Fallopian tubes. The monthly release of an egg from the ovary (ovulation) is not affected by sterilization, but the egg can no longer be reached by sperm and so cannot be fertilized. Women are usually admitted to hospital for one or two days, and a general anesthetic is needed. Sterilization is a permanent means of contraception that cannot be reversed if you change your mind.

Natural Family Planning

Natural family planning (NFP) involves awareness of your fertility to reduce your chances of getting pregnant. It requires not having sexual intercourse on the days when you are most likely to ovulate. Ovulation is estimated based upon changes in the cervical mucus or changes in body temperature.

© Griffin Hospital 2004



Women's Health Coordination Center at Griffin Hospital
www.vwhcc.org • info@vwhcc.org • Tel: 203.732.1330