

# Birth Control Options

Taking steps to prevent pregnancy



VALLEY HEALTH PARTNERS

# Birth Control Options

If you do not want to have a baby right now, you need to take steps to make sure you do not get pregnant when you have sex. This handout outlines the ways you can prevent pregnancy, as well as sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Birth control method	Number of pregnancies per 100 women within their first year of typical use	Does it help protect against STIs?
Abstinence (no sexual contact)	0	Yes
Permanent sterilization surgery for women (“getting your tubes tied”)	Less than 1	No
Permanent sterilization implant for women	Less than 1	No
Permanent sterilization surgery for men	Less than 1	No
Implantable rod	Less than 1	No
Copper intrauterine device (IUD)	Less than 1	No
Hormonal intrauterine devices (IUDs)	Less than 1	No
Shot/injection	6	No
Oral contraceptives, combination hormones (“the pill”)	9	No
Oral contraceptives, progestin-only pill (“mini-pill”)	9	No
Skin patch	9	No
Vaginal ring	9	No
Diaphragm with spermicide	12	No
Sponge with spermicide	12 (among women who have never given birth before)	No
	24 (among women who have given birth)	
Cervical cap with spermicide	23	No
Male condom	18	Yes
Female condom	21	Yes
Withdrawal – when a man takes his penis out of a woman’s vagina (or “pulls out”) before he ejaculates	22	No



## Abstinence

Abstinence means that you do not have sex. If you do not have sex, you cannot get pregnant. This is the only method that always prevents pregnancy. If you do not have vaginal, oral or anal sex, you also can protect yourself from STIs.

## Rhythm method

You must know your body very well and your period must be regular to use this method. Because of this, the rhythm method is not the best choice for teenagers. This method does not protect you against STIs.

To rely on the rhythm method you need to check your cervical mucus (the discharge from your vagina) and take your temperature every day. You are most likely to get pregnant when your cervical mucus is clear and slippery and when your temperature goes up slightly, which means you are ovulating. If you do not want to get pregnant, you should not have sex when you notice these things. You should not have sex from the end of your period until 3 days after your temperature goes up. This method does not protect you from STIs.

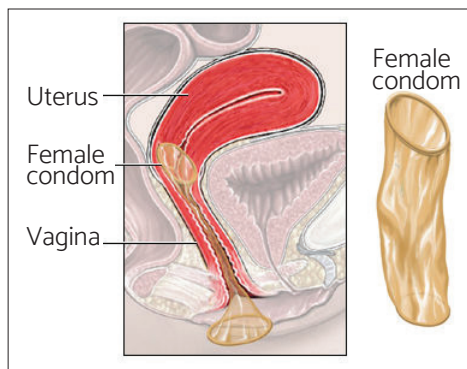
## Barrier methods

This means you prevent pregnancy by blocking the egg and sperm from coming together using a barrier. Barriers include:

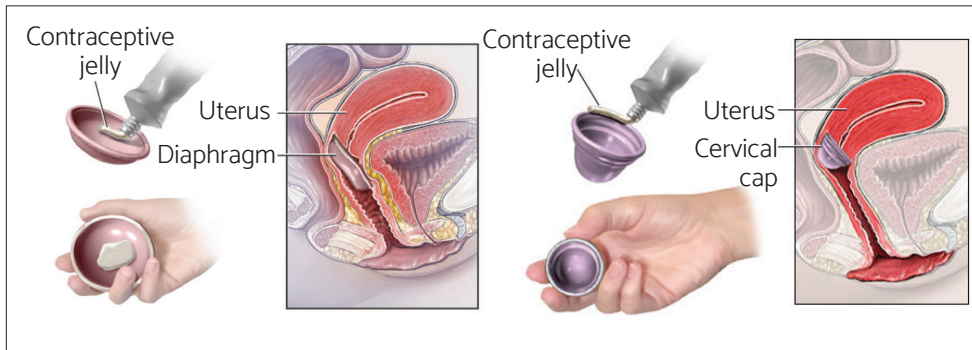
**Male condom:** This is a thin sheath worn over the man's penis, and it is put on when the penis is erect (hard). It catches sperm that come out of the penis during sex. Condoms cannot be reused. Latex and polyurethane condoms also protect against STIs; natural or lambskin condoms do not. Condoms that have spermicide (a sperm killer) are better at protecting against pregnancy than condoms without spermicide. You also could use a vaginal spermicide. You can get condoms and spermicide at drug stores and other retailers.



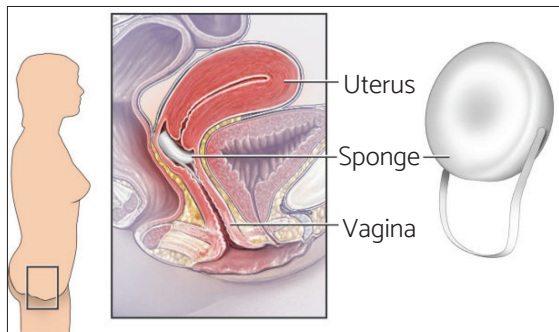
**Female condom:** This is a thin sheath placed in the woman's vagina that stops sperm from getting into the uterus (womb). It can be put in up to 8 hours before sex. It catches sperm that come out of the penis during sex. Just like the male condom, you need to use a new one each time you have sex. Female condoms also offer protection from STIs. You can get condoms at drug stores and other retailers.



**Diaphragm, cervical cap, cervical shield:** These are all worn by the woman and block sperm from going into your cervix. You will need to see your doctor to be fitted for a diaphragm or cap. You can buy the shield at most drug stores. Add spermicide to your diaphragm, cap or shield before putting it into your vagina. Do not take the diaphragm, cap or shield out for 6 to 8 hours after having sex to protect you from pregnancy. None of these protect against STIs.



**Contraceptive sponge:** This is a soft sponge that has spermicide in it. You wet the sponge and put it into your vagina to cover your cervix before having sex. You can leave the sponge in for 30 hours and have sex as many times as you like in that time period. You should leave the sponge in for 6 hours after having sex to prevent pregnancy. Throw the sponge away after you take it out. This method does not protect against STIs.





## Hormonal Methods

This means your doctor prescribes a medicine that changes your body and prevents pregnancy by interfering with ovulation, fertilization or implantation of a fertilized egg. Hormonal methods include:

### **Oral contraceptives (usually called the pill or birth control pill):**

This is a pill you take every day. The pill has the hormones progesterin and estrogen. These hormones stop your ovaries from releasing an egg each month and change the lining in your uterus, so you cannot get pregnant. Not everyone can take the pill. Some common reasons you may not be able to take the pill are if you:

- Are over age 35 and smoke
- Have had a blood clot in the past
- Have had breast, liver or endometrial cancer

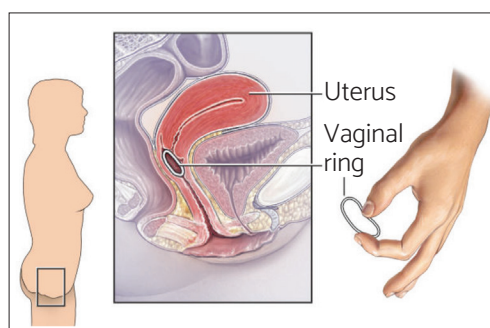
There are many different kinds of pills. You and your doctor will decide which one is right for you. You may need to try a couple different ones before you find one that you like.

You have to take the pill at the same time every day or the pill might not work, and you could get pregnant. This method does not protect against STIs.

**Shot/injection:** You get the shot once every 3 months. It has the hormone progesterin. Like the pill, it stops your ovaries from releasing an egg. It also causes changes in your cervix so that sperm cannot meet an egg. The shot is convenient because you don't need to remember to take a pill every day, however it is very important that you get your next shot on time or you could get pregnant. Your doctor will talk to you about how long you can use the shot for birth control. Using the shot too many years in a row can be bad for your bones. This method does not protect against STIs.

**Vaginal ring:** This is a small, flexible ring that you put in your vagina. It stays there for 3 weeks and then you take it out for 1 week, and you will get your period. The ring releases the hormones progestin and estrogen, just like the combined birth control pill. These hormones stop your ovaries from releasing an egg and thicken your cervical mucus so sperm cannot swim through it. This method does not protect against STIs. Not everyone can use the ring, including women who:

- Are overweight
- Have had a blood clot in the past
- Are over age 35 and smoke



**Patch:** The patch works a lot like the vaginal ring. You place a patch on your stomach, buttocks, upper body or arm and leave it on for 3 weeks. You then take it off on week 4, and you will get your period. The patch releases the hormones progestin and estrogen, just like the combined birth control pill. These hormones stop your ovaries from releasing an egg and thicken your cervical mucus so sperm cannot swim through it. This method does not protect against STIs.

Not everyone can use the patch, including women who:

- Have had a blood clot in the past
- Are over age 35 and smoke



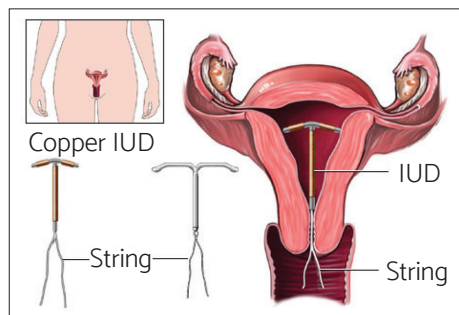
## Removable implantable devices

These devices can be inserted and taken out by your doctor. Some of them are hormonal and some are not. The hormonal implantable devices are the implantable rod and the hormonal IUD. You can learn about them below.

**Intrauterine Device (IUD):** This is a small T-shaped device that your doctor puts into your cervix. It releases progestin, which stops your ovaries from releasing an egg each month. It also thickens your cervical mucus so sperm can't swim through it. You can leave this IUD in place for 5 years. This method does not protect against STIs.

**Implantable rod:** A rod the size of a matchbook is placed under the skin of your upper arm. It releases progestin, which stops your ovaries from releasing an egg each month. It also causes changes in your uterus lining and thickens your cervical mucus so sperm can't swim through it. This rod can stay in place for up to 3 years. This method does not protect against STIs.

**Copper IUD:** This is a small T-shaped device that your doctor puts into your cervix. This device is made of copper. The copper prevents the sperm from reaching your eggs and also changes the lining of your uterus. This type of IUD can stay in place for up to 10 years. This method does not protect against STIs.



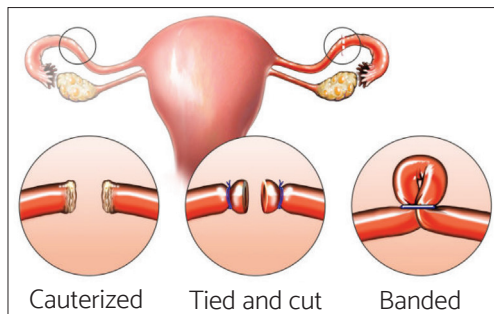


## Permanent birth control methods

Permanent birth control is for when you are finished having children or you decide you never want children. This type of birth control does not protect against STIs.

**Sterilization implant:** Unlike other implantable devices talked about above, these implants cannot be taken out. The implants are placed into your fallopian tubes, and scar tissue forms so your eggs can no longer reach your uterus. It takes 3 months for scar tissue to form around the implants, so you will need to use a back-up method to prevent pregnancy until you have a test that shows the tubes are blocked.

**Surgical sterilization:** For women, this is a surgery called tubal ligation to close fallopian tubes so eggs can no longer reach the uterus. Tubes can be cut, tied or sealed. For men, this is a surgery called vasectomy to stop sperm from entering the penis. It can take 3 months before all sperm is out of the penis, so you'll need to use a back-up method to prevent pregnancy until you have a test that shows the sperm are out of the ejaculate.



## Emergency contraception

If you have unprotected sex or if your birth control method fails (for example, the condom breaks or you forgot to take your birth control pill), emergency contraception is an option to still prevent pregnancy. You also may have heard this called Plan B or the morning-after pill, and you can get it at most pharmacies. You need to take this as soon as possible after having unprotected sex. If it is more than 72 hours after, it may not work. This should not be used regularly as birth control. It is for emergencies. This method does not protect against STIs.

## What's right for you?

When it comes to birth control, you have a lot of choices – and only you know what's right for you. If you don't want to have a baby, the most important thing is that you use something. If you are not in a long-term relationship, if you are in an open relationship or if you have multiple partners, you also need to think about STI protection. Talk to your doctor about your needs, and you will find the right birth control option for you.

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