

Choosing a Contraceptive Method



What is the perfect contraceptive?

The truth is, the perfect contraceptive does not exist. Each couple must evaluate the pros and cons of the available options and choose the contraceptive that will work best for them in their particular circumstances.

In evaluating a contraceptive, there are two ways of looking at how effective it is (how well it prevents unwanted pregnancy). One is **method effectiveness** and the other is **user effectiveness**.

Method Effectiveness: This is the effectiveness of the method: how well does the method work under perfect conditions (used correctly for every sex act). This shows the risk of pregnancy even when the method is used perfectly every time.

User Effectiveness: This is how well the method works in the real world. This figure accounts for the times people forget to use a method or use it incorrectly, in addition to the failures that occur even though the method was used correctly. This figure shows how the method works when large numbers of real people in everyday life use it.

Pregnancy Rates for Birth Control Methods

The following table provides estimates of the effectiveness of birth control methods used for one year. These estimates are based on a variety of studies.

Method	User Effectiveness (Real World)	Method Effectiveness (Perfect Use)
Sterilization:		
Male Sterilization	99.98%	99.99%
Female Sterilization	99.95%	99.95%
Hormonal Methods:		
Implant (Norplant)	99.99%	99.99%
Hormone Shot (Depo-Provera)	99.97%	99.97%
Combined Pill (Estrogen/Progestin)	95-97%	99.99%
Minipill (Progestin only)	95%	99.95%
Intrauterine Devices (IUDs):		
Copper T (nonhormonal)	99.91%	99.94%
Progesterone IUD (hormonal)	98%	99.5%

Barrier Methods:		
Male Latex Condom ¹	86%	97%
Diaphragm ²	80%	94%
Vaginal Sponge (no previous births) ³	80%	91%
Vaginal Sponge (previous births) ³	60%	80%
Cervical Cap (no previous births) ²	80%	91%
Cervical Cap (previous births) ²	60%	74%
Female Condom	79%	95%
Spermicide: (gel, foam, suppository, film)	74%	94%
Natural Methods:		
Withdrawal	91%	96%
Natural Family Planning (calendar, temperature, cervical mucus)	75%	91-99%
No Method:	15%	15%

1 Used Without Spermicide

2 Used With Spermicide

3 Contains Spermicide

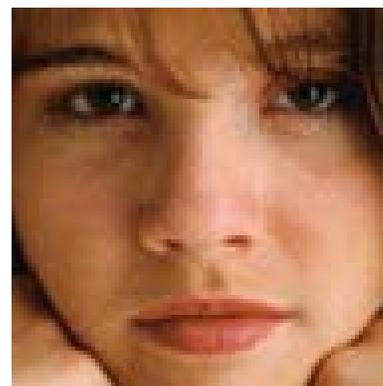
Data adapted from: R.A. Hatcher, J. Trussell, F. Stewart, et al., *Contraceptive Technology*, 17th Revised edition, New York, NY: Irvington Publishers Inc. (in press).

Table prepared by FDA: 5/13/97

What factors should I consider when choosing a method?

Generally, you should think about the following:

- How safe is the method?
- What are your plans for pregnancy in the future? Will your method affect your plans?
- What is your risk for STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)? Does your method protect you?
- What health conditions do you have that could be affected by your method?
- How likely are you to be able to use the method correctly every day for every act of intercourse?
- Does your partner like the method and will he cooperate in its use?



How are the different methods used? What are their advantages and disadvantages?

Abstinence

Mechanism:

No sexual intercourse or sex play involving contact of the penis and vagina. Prevents the sperm from joining the egg.

Advantages:

- 100% effective in preventing the spread of most STDs
- 100% effective in preventing pregnancy

Disadvantages:

- Difficult to abstain for some couples

Emergency Contraception

Mechanism:

- Pills: if taken before ovulation, prevent or delay the release of the egg and the normal hormone production that supports a pregnancy
- IUD: Prevents fertilization and implantation
- Most effective if taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse
- Average success about 75%, ranges from 55-94%

Advantages:

Decreases the risk of pregnancy from:



- Unprotected intercourse
- Broken or slipped condom
- Incorrect insertion of diaphragm
- Intercourse after missing 1-2 pills, especially in 1st 2 weeks of pill pack
- Intercourse after missing 1 or more minipills
- Female condom inserted or removed incorrectly, spilling semen
- IUD partially or totally expelled
- Couple using fertility awareness (NFP) has sex on wrong day
- Woman exposed to something that could cause birth defects in possible baby

Disadvantages:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Menstrual changes
- Lower effectiveness than other methods. Should be used as a backup method only, not as a primary method of contraception

Male Condoms

Mechanism

- Acts as a physical barrier to block passage of semen.
- Is only effective if used from start to finish of each sex act.



Advantages

- Risk of breakage is very low - 0-6.7%; Risk of slippage is 0.6-5.4%
- Among the most inexpensive and cost effective methods
- Protects against STDs
- Prevents infertility (by preventing STDs)
- Easily accessible
- Allows men to participate in contraception
- Can help men maintain erection longer and prevent premature ejaculation
- Prevents postcoital (after intercourse) leakage of semen (more hygienic)
- Prevents sperm allergy
- Immediate proof of protection
- Can be easily and discretely carried by both men and women
- Minimal side effects

Disadvantages:

- Decreased sensitivity
- Decreased spontaneity
- May make it difficult for some men to maintain erection
- Embarrassing to purchase
- New condom must be used for each act of intercourse
- Men may not want to take responsibility for contraception
- Man or woman may be latex allergic
- Must be used correctly to be effective
- Should not be used with the following lubricants: baby oil, cold cream, edible oils such as olive or peanut, hand and body lotions, massage oil, Vaseline, rubbing alcohol, suntan oil and lotion, vegetable or mineral oil, vaginal yeast infection medicine in cream or suppository form

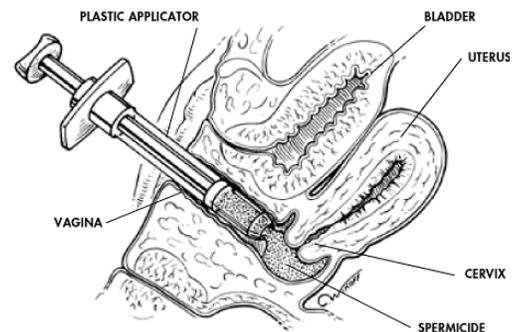
Vaginal Spermicides

Mechanism:

- Destroys cell membrane of sperm so can't penetrate egg
- Provides about 25% protection against STDs

Advantages:

- Small protection against STDs
- Over the counter, no clinic visit required
- Can be used without knowledge/participation of male partner
- Can be kept available for immediate protection
- Good backup method for woman waiting to start pills, get IUD inserted for woman who forgot to take pills or thinks IUD was expelled (best used with condoms)
- Can be used to augment natural family planning
- Can be used for lubrication, especially with condoms



Disadvantages:

- May cause temporary skin irritation
- Tastes unpleasant
- May increase risk of vaginal yeast infection
- May increase risk of bacterial vaginosis

Vaginal Barriers (Diaphragm, Sponge, Cervical Cap, Female Condom)

Mechanism:

- Provides a physical barrier
 - Female condom (see illustration on right) lines the vagina entirely and partially shields the perineum (area between the vagina and the rectum)
 - Diaphragm, cap and sponge provide physical barrier and also chemical to kill sperm

Advantages:

- Medically safe
- Similar to consistent use of male condom
- Does not change woman's hormone patterns
- Does not cause systemic (whole body) side effects
- With exception of female condom, does not require cooperation of male partner
- Available for immediate protection whenever needed
- Female condom protects from STDs



Disadvantages:

- Except for female condom, does not protect from STDs
- Increased risk for urinary tract infection, BV, vaginal yeast, especially when used with spermicide
- May cause vaginal discomfort
- May cause penile irritation
- With sponge, vaginal dryness occurs
- Diaphragm, cap or sponge left in may cause foul odor and discharge
- May trigger latex allergy
- Rarely, toxic shock syndrome may occur
- Should not be used with the following lubricants: baby oil, cold cream, edible oils such as olive or peanut, hand and body lotions, massage oil, Vaseline, rubbing alcohol, suntan oil and lotion, vegetable or mineral oil, vaginal yeast infection medicine in cream or suppository form

Combined Oral Contraceptives or “The Pill”

Mechanism:

- Prevents ovulation (making of an egg)
- Changes the lining of the uterus to make it less hospitable to the fertilized egg
- Acts to prevent the ovary from making hormones which support an early pregnancy
- Thickens cervical mucus so sperm can't penetrate

Advantages:

- Very effective when taken correctly and consistently
- Gives women control over their fertility

- Very safe for most women
- Can be used safely throughout the reproductive years
- Does not need a “rest period”
- Does not cause loss of fertility
- Decreases menstrual cramps and pain
- Eliminates midcycle ovulation pain
- Decreases number of days of bleeding and amount of bleeding
- Can avoid period on weekend, vacation, special occasion
- Can have fewer cycles by taking 2-3 packs consecutively
- Can reduce PMS symptoms like anxiety, depression, headache, fluid retention (swelling)
- Improves hirsutism (women with excessive hairiness)
- Prevents ovarian and endometrial cancer
- Prevents functional ovarian cysts
- Decreases risk of benign breast disease
- Prevents tubal pregnancy
- Improves acne
- Enhances sexual enjoyment by decreasing fear of pregnancy
- Improves other medical conditions such as osteoporosis, endometriosis, rheumatoid arthritis
- Can be used for emergency contraception
- Prevents atherogenesis (fatty deposits in veins)



Disadvantages:

- Does not protect against STDs
- Must be taken daily
- Expensive
- May cause unwanted changes in periods like missed periods, spotting, breakthrough bleeding (bleeding between periods)
- May cause nausea and vomiting in first 2-3 months
- May cause headaches
- May increase depression (although more commonly improves it)
- May decrease sex drive
- May make women more susceptible to Chlamydia
- May increase risk of heart disease
- May not be effective if taken with certain antibiotics

Minipill

Mechanism:

- Inhibits ovulation
- Decreases and thickens cervical mucus to prevent penetration by sperm
- Suppresses hormonal cycle
- Changes the lining of the uterus
- Changes the fallopian tubes to make it harder for sperm to pass
- Prevents the ovaries from making hormones to support an early pregnancy

Advantages:

- Safe for breastfeeding; does not decrease milk supply
- Low failure rate when taken correctly

- Effectiveness is not decreased if you must take antibiotics
- Decreased risk of endometrial cancer and PID
- Decreased menstrual cramping and pain
- Decreased risk of anemia
- Does not usually cause typical side effects of birth control pills such as nausea and breast tenderness
- Periods and fertility quickly return to normal when you stop using the minipill

Disadvantages

- Very low dose; can become pregnant after 1 missed pill. Have a pregnancy test if you do not bleed for 60 days
- Can cause spotting between periods, irregular or missed periods
- Must be obsessively regular about taking pill every day at roughly the same time
- A pill taken 3 hours late is the same as a missed pill. You continue taking the pill and use a backup method for 48 hours.
- May be effected by some medications (such as rifampin and anti-seizure meds) due to low dose
- Does not protect against STDs
- Increased risk of functional (harmless but sometimes uncomfortable) cysts on the ovaries
- Increased risk of ectopic pregnancy
- May not be available in all pharmacies

Vaginal Ring, Patch

Mechanism:

- Contains both female hormones, estrogen and progesterone
- Stops ovaries from releasing an egg
- Makes cervical mucus thicker so sperm can't penetrate
- Changes the lining of the uterus
- Releases hormones via time release through the skin or vaginal walls
- Ring works regardless of where it is placed in the vagina
- Patch is not affected by geographic location, temperature or humidity



Advantages:

- Highly effective
- Completely suppress ovulation
- Easily used and removed by the woman herself
- Rapid return of fertility when discontinue use
- Does not cause nausea and vomiting
- Simple to use: change patch once a week or change ring once a month
- Predictable, regular cycles
- Decreased menstrual cramps and blood loss
- May decrease acne



Disadvantages:

- May cause slight weight gain or mood swings
- May cause headaches
- Ring may irritate vagina, patch may irritate skin
- Dangerous side effects such as blood clots increased risk in smokers

DepoProvera



Mechanism:

- Inhibits ovulation
- Decreases and thickens cervical mucus to prevent penetration by sperm
- Suppresses hormonal cycle
- Changes the lining of the uterus
- Changes the fallopian tubes to make it harder for sperm to pass
- Prevents the ovaries from making hormones to support an early pregnancy

Advantages:

- Do not contain estrogen so avoid the complications of estrogen such as blood clots
- Decrease the amount and frequency of menstrual bleeding
- Lessens the frequency of anemia (low iron)
- Suppresses pain with ovulation
- Decreases the risk of endometrial and ovarian cancer and PID (pelvic inflammatory disease)
- Helps to manage the pain of endometriosis
- Minipills (not Depo) are immediately reversible (you can become pregnant immediately after stopping the minipill)
- Depo is extremely effective as a long term contraceptive
- Depo decreases the risk of tubal pregnancy
- May cause missed periods. Periods may disappear after 9-12 months of usage of Depo
- Culturally acceptable
- Can be used without knowledge/participation of male partner
- Do not interact with other drugs
- Decreases seizures in epileptics
- Good for breastfeeding

Disadvantages of Depo:

- Given by needle
- May cause weight gain (as much as 8-20 pounds/year) or make it difficult to lose post pregnancy weight
- Not immediately reversible. May take months to become pregnant after stopping Depo
- Clinic visit every 12 weeks
- May cause headaches
- May cause depression
- May cause hair loss
- May cause allergic reactions
- Decreases bone density (may be more of a risk factor with smokers)

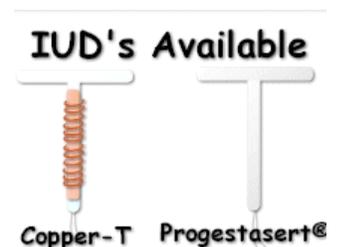
IUD

Mechanism:

- Prevents sperm from fertilizing egg
- Makes it difficult for sperm to travel to egg through uterus and tubes
- Decreases risk of intrauterine and tubal pregnancy

Advantages:

- Can be used by women who can't use hormonal methods



- Does not interfere with breastfeeding
- Progestin IUDs decrease blood loss and menstrual cramps
- Progestin IUDs reduce the risk of PID
- Progestin IUDs can be used to treat excessively heavy menstrual bleeding
- Can prevent and treat Asherman's Syndrome (scar tissue connecting the walls of the uterus after abortion or uterine surgery)
- After the first year, the annual cost is less per year than other methods
- Easy method to use, does not require clinic visits after insertion
- No systemic side-effects (unless allergic to copper)
- Highly effective long term method



Disadvantages:

- Increased risk of PID, especially with insertion
- 2-10% expelled spontaneously in first year
- Can cause complications if pregnancy occurs with IUD in place
- Does not prevent STDs
- May cause increased cramping and bleeding, especially in the first 3-4 menstrual cycles
- Woman must be comfortable with touching herself to do monthly string check

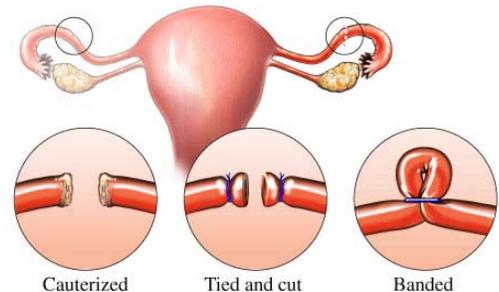
Sterilization

Mechanism:

- In the female, blocks the tube to prevent egg and sperm from uniting
- In the male, blocks passage of sperm into the ejaculate (semen)

Advantages of BTL (Bilateral Tubal Ligation or cutting of both tubes):

- Permanent
- Highly effective
- Cost effective
- Nothing to buy or remember
- No significant side effects (does not effect menstrual cycle, sex drive, mood or weight)
- No need for partner participation
- No need to interrupt lovemaking
- Privacy of choice
- Can be done as an outpatient procedure

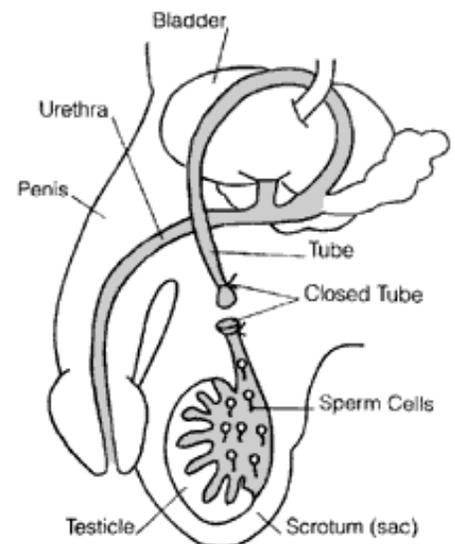


Disadvantages of BTL

- Permanent
- Regret for decision high in some women
- Reversibility difficult, expensive and not always possible
- Technically difficult
- Major surgery done in operating room
- Expensive at time of procedure
- Probability of tubal pregnancy if method fails
- Does not protect against STDs

Advantages of Vasectomy:

- Permanent
- Highly effective
- Cost effective (most cost effective of all methods)



- Removes contraceptive burden from woman
- Lack of significant long term side effects
- High acceptability
- No need to interrupt lovemaking
- Safe
- Quick recovery
- Can be done in a doctor's office
- Does not effect mood, sex drive, ability to achieve erection or enjoyment of lovemaking

Disadvantages of Vasectomy:

- Permanent
- Protects the MALE but it is the FEMALE who is at risk for pregnancy
- Surgical procedure
- Expensive at time of procedure
- Theoretical serious long term side effects, but these are unproven
- Reversible possible in first few years after surgery but expensive, difficult and not guaranteed
- Regret high in some men
- Does not protect against STDs