



CONTRACEPTIVES 101

How do the different birth control options work?

Various types of birth control work in different ways. Birth control methods may:

- Prevent sperm from reaching the egg
- Inactivate or damage sperm
- Prevent an egg from being released each month
- Alter the lining of the uterus so that a fertilized egg doesn't attach to it
- Thicken cervical mucus so that sperm can't easily pass through it

How do I choose?

The best method of birth control for you is one that is safe, that you are comfortable using, and that you are able to use consistently and correctly. Your preferred method of birth control may change over your lifetime and is influenced by many different factors, including:

- Your age and health history
- Your reproductive goals, such as the number of children you want and how soon you want to get pregnant
- Relationship factors, including marital status, number of sexual partners, how often you have sex and partner preferences
- Religious beliefs

Differences between birth control methods include how effective they are at preventing pregnancy, side effects, cost, and whether they prevent sexually transmitted infections.

Knowing your options is definitely part of the decision process — but an honest assessment of yourself and your relationships is just as important when deciding which type of birth control is right for you.

What are the side effects?

Consider your tolerance for the possible side effects associated with a particular birth control method. Some methods pose more side effects — some potentially more serious — than others. Talk to your doctor about your medical history and how it might affect your choice of birth control.



What contraceptive method is right for me?

Fertility awareness methods. These methods focus on knowing which days of the month you are able to get pregnant (fertile), often based on basal body temperature and cervical mucus. To avoid getting pregnant, you do not have sex on or around the days you are fertile, or you use a barrier method of birth control.



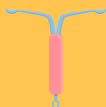
Barrier methods. Examples include male and female condoms, as well as the diaphragm, cervical cap and contraceptive sponge. FREE condoms are available at all health department locations.



Short-acting hormonal methods. Examples include birth control pills, as well as the vaginal ring (NuvaRing), skin patch (Xulane) and contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera). These are considered short-acting methods because you have to remember to use them on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.



Long-acting hormonal methods. Examples include the copper IUD (ParaGard), the hormonal IUD (Mirena, Skyla, Kyleena, others) and the contraceptive implant (Nexplanon). These are considered long-acting methods because they last for three to 10 years after insertion (depending on the device) or until you decide to have the device removed.



Spermicide or vaginal gel. These are nonhormonal options for birth control. Spermicide is a type of contraceptive that kills sperm or stops it from moving. Vaginal pH regulator gel (Phexxi) stops sperm from moving, so they can't get to an egg to fertilize it. You put these products in the vagina right before sex.



Sterilization. This is a permanent method of birth control. Examples include tubal ligation for women and vasectomy for men.



It's also important to be aware of emergency contraception — such as the morning-after pill (Plan B One-Step, Aftera, ella, others) — which can be used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex.

Does it protect against sexually transmitted infections?

Male and female condoms are the only methods of birth control that offer reliable protection from sexually transmitted infections. Unless you are in a mutually monogamous relationship and have been tested for sexually transmitted infections, use a new condom every time you have sex in addition to any other method of birth control you use.

Information in this handout is made available by Mayo Clinic. Please contact your Primary Care Physician or OBGYN before making any life altering medical decisions. Don't have a primary care provider? Connect with a CVHD Community Health Worker today.

