

# BIRTH CONTROL

## METHODS, EFFECTIVENESS & SIDE EFFECTS



*Compassionate care for  
all stages of life*

### What is birth control? \_\_\_\_\_

Birth control (contraception) is any method, medicine, or device used to prevent pregnancy. Women can choose from many different types of birth control. Some work better than others at preventing pregnancy. The type of birth control you use depends on your health, your desire to have children now or in the future, and your need to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Your doctor can help you decide which type is best for you right now.

### What is the best method of birth control? \_\_\_\_\_

There is no “best” method of birth control for every woman. The birth control method that is right for you and your partner depends on many things, and may change over time.

- Before choosing a birth control method, talk to your doctor or nurse about:
- Whether you want to get pregnant soon, in a few years, or never
- How well each method works to prevent pregnancy
- Possible side effects
- How often you have sex
- The number of sex partners you have
- Your overall health
- How comfortable you are with using the method (For example, can you remember to take a pill every day? Will you have to ask your partner to put on a condom each time?)

Learn about types of birth control that you or your partner can use to prevent pregnancy.

Keep in mind that even the most effective birth control methods can fail. But your chances of getting pregnant are lower if you use a more effective method.

### What are the different types of birth control? \_\_\_\_\_

Women can choose from many different types of birth control methods. These include, in order of most effective to least effective at preventing pregnancy:

**Female and male sterilization** (female tubal ligation or occlusion, male vasectomy) — Birth control that prevents pregnancy for the rest of your life through surgery or a medical procedure.

**Long-acting reversible contraceptives or “LARC” methods** (intrauterine devices, hormonal implants) — Birth control your doctor inserts one time and you do not have to remember to use birth control every day or month. LARCs last for 3 to 10 years, depending on the method.

**Short-acting hormonal methods** (pill, mini pills, patch, shot, vaginal ring) — Birth control your doctor prescribes that you remember to take every day or month. The shot requires you to get a shot from your doctor every 3 months.

**Barrier methods** (condoms, diaphragms, sponge, cervical cap) — Birth control you use each time you have sex. **Natural rhythm methods** — Not using a type of birth control but instead avoiding sex and/or using birth control only on the days when you are most fertile (most likely to get pregnant). An ovulation home test kit or a fertility monitor can help you find your most fertile days.

## Which types of birth control help prevent STIs? \_\_\_\_\_

Only two types can protect you from STIs, including HIV: male condoms and female condoms.

While condoms are the best way to prevent STIs if you have sex, they are not the most effective type of birth control. If you have sex, the best way to prevent both STIs and pregnancy is to use what is called “dual protection.” Dual protection means you use a condom to prevent STIs each time you have sex, and at the same time, you use a more effective form of birth control, such as an IUD, implant, or shot.

## Which types of birth control can I get without a prescription? \_\_\_\_\_

You can buy these types of birth control over the counter at a drugstore or supermarket:

- Male condoms
- Female condoms
- Sponges
- Spermicides
- Emergency contraception (EC) pills. Plan B One-Step® and its generic versions are available in drugstores and some supermarkets to anyone, without a prescription. However you should not use EC as your regular birth control because it does not work as well as regular birth control. EC is meant to be used only when your regular birth control does not work for some unexpected reason.

## Which types of birth control do I have to see my doctor to get? \_\_\_\_\_

**You need a prescription for these types of birth control:**

- Oral contraceptives: the pill and the mini-pill (in some states, birth control pills are now available without a prescription, through the pharmacy)
- Patch
- Vaginal ring
- Diaphragms (your doctor or nurse needs to fit one to the shape of your vagina)
- Shot/injection (you get the shot at your doctor’s office or family planning clinic)
- Cervical cap
- Implantable rod (inserted by a doctor in the office or clinic)
- IUD (inserted by a doctor in the office or clinic)

**You will need surgery or a medical procedure for:**

- Female sterilization (tubal ligation)
- Male sterilization (vasectomy)
- Tubal implant (Essure®)

## How does birth control work? \_\_\_\_\_

Birth control works to prevent pregnancy in different ways, depending upon the type of birth control you choose:

**Female or male sterilization surgery** prevents the sperm from reaching the egg by cutting or damaging the tubes that carry sperm (in men) or eggs (in women).

**Long-acting reversible contraceptives or “LARC” methods** (intrauterine devices, hormonal implants) prevent your ovaries from releasing eggs, prevent sperm from getting to the egg, or make implantation of the egg in the uterus (womb) unlikely.

**Short-acting hormonal methods**, such as the pill, mini-pill, patch, shot, and vaginal ring, prevent your ovaries from releasing eggs or prevent sperm from getting to the egg.

Barrier methods, such as condoms, diaphragms, sponge, cervical cap, prevent sperm from getting to the egg.

**Natural rhythm methods** involve avoiding sex or using other forms of birth control on the days when you are most fertile (most likely to get pregnant).

## Are birth control pills safe? \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, hormonal birth control methods, such as the pill, are safe for most women. Today's birth control pills have lower doses of hormones than in the past. This has lowered the risk of side effects and serious health problems.

Today's birth control pills can have health benefits for some women, such as a lower risk of some kinds of cancer. Also, different brands and types of birth control pills (and other forms of hormonal birth control) can increase your risk for some health problems and side effects. Side effects can include weight gain, headaches, irregular bleeding, breast tenderness, and mood changes.

Talk to your doctor about whether hormonal birth control is right for you.

## Does birth control raise my risk for health problems? \_\_\_\_\_

It can, depending on your health and the type of birth control you use. Talk to your doctor to find the birth control method that is right for you.

Different forms of birth control have different health risks and side effects. Some birth control methods that increase your risk for health problems include:

**Hormonal birth control.** Combination birth control pills (birth control with both estrogen and progesterone) and some other forms of hormonal birth control, such as the vaginal ring or skin patch, may raise your risk for blood clots and high blood pressure. Blood clots and high blood pressure can cause a heart attack or stroke. A blood clot in the legs can also go to your lungs, causing serious damage or even death. These are serious side effects of hormonal birth control, but they are rare.

**Spermicides** (used alone or with the cervical cap, diaphragm or sponge). Spermicides that have nonoxynol-9 can irritate the vagina. This can raise your risk for getting HIV. Use spermicides with nonoxynol-9 only if you are in a monogamous relationship (you have sex only with each other) with a man you know is HIV-negative. Also, medicines for vaginal yeast infections may make spermicides less effective.

**Intrauterine devices (IUDs).** IUDs can slightly raise your risk of an ectopic pregnancy. Ectopic pregnancies happen when a fertilized egg implants somewhere outside of the uterus (womb), usually in one of the fallopian tubes. An ectopic pregnancy is a serious medical problem that should be treated as soon as possible. IUDs also have a very rare but serious risk of infection or puncture of the uterus.

## Can birth control help with my painful or heavy periods? \_\_\_\_\_

Maybe. Research shows that hormonal birth control, such as the pill, patch, shot, ring, implantable rod, and hormonal IUD, may help with heavy, painful, or long-term bleeding. These methods can also help you have lighter, shorter periods.

