

# Birth Control Fact Sheet

## Abstinence

- Abstinence means not having sex. For some people, abstinence means no sexual contact at all. For others, it can mean avoiding any sexual contact that could put someone at risk for pregnancy or STD.

**Effectiveness:** If no semen enters the vagina, abstinence is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. Different definitions of abstinence can affect its effectiveness. A couple who interprets abstinence to mean “no sexual touching at all,” definitely won’t get pregnant. If they interpret abstinence to mean “everything except sexual intercourse,” there is some chance that semen could get near or even into the vagina. People who choose abstinence need to know how to deal with sexual pressures and stick to their choice so they don’t go past the sexual limits they have set.

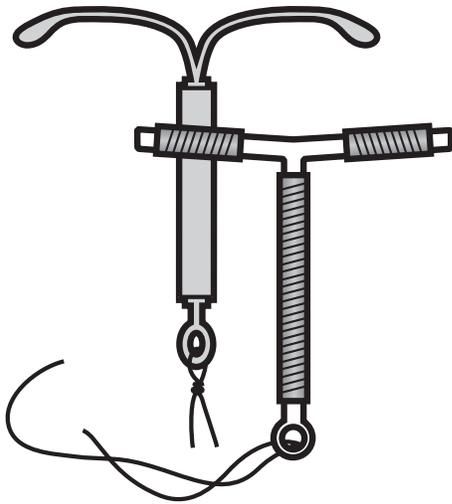
**Advantages:** Abstinence is easy to use because you don’t have to go to a clinic or see a doctor to get it. You don’t need to buy or use anything or remember to take a pill or change a patch. If it’s used all the time and no blood, semen, or vaginal fluids are exchanged, abstinence prevents pregnancy and also protects you from HIV and other STDs. Abstinence can also allow a relationship to grow and become stronger without the pressures having sex can bring. It’s approved by virtually all families and cultures.

**Disadvantages:** A possible disadvantage is that it can be difficult to remain abstinent under pressure. It’s important for both partners to agree on being abstinent and to support each other’s choice.

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## IUD

IUD stands for intrauterine device. It's a small piece of plastic, often shaped like a T, that is inserted into the uterus. Some IUDs are wrapped with copper wire. They prevent pregnancy by affecting the way the sperm move and preventing sperm from fertilizing an egg. Other brands of IUDs release hormones that prevent pregnancy the same way as the pill. An IUD can stay in the uterus for 3 to 10 years. It must be inserted and removed by a health care provider.



**Effectiveness:** The IUD is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy. Because it's always in place, the person doesn't need to remember to take a pill or change a patch or ring.

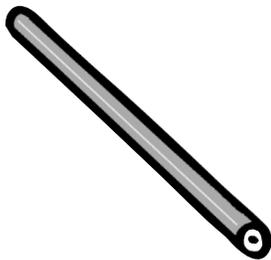
**Advantages:** The IUD is one of the most effective birth control methods available. It's always in place and some types can provide protection against pregnancy for up to 10 years. It doesn't interfere with sex. A person can use an IUD for birth control without needing cooperation from a partner.

**Disadvantages:** The copper-T IUD may cause more bleeding and cramping during periods, or spotting between periods. An IUD doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs. It needs to be removed by a health care provider—a person can't just stop using it without seeing a provider.

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## Implant

The implant is a tiny plastic rod of artificial hormones that is inserted under the skin on the inside of a person's upper arm. The rod slowly releases hormones into the body. The rod and the scar from its insertion are nearly invisible. The implant lasts for 3 years. It prevents pregnancy by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month, and/or thickening the mucus in the cervix (the opening to the womb) so it's hard for sperm to enter the uterus. It must be prescribed and inserted by a health care provider.



**Effectiveness:** The implant is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy. Because it's always in place, the person doesn't need to remember to take a pill or change a patch or ring.

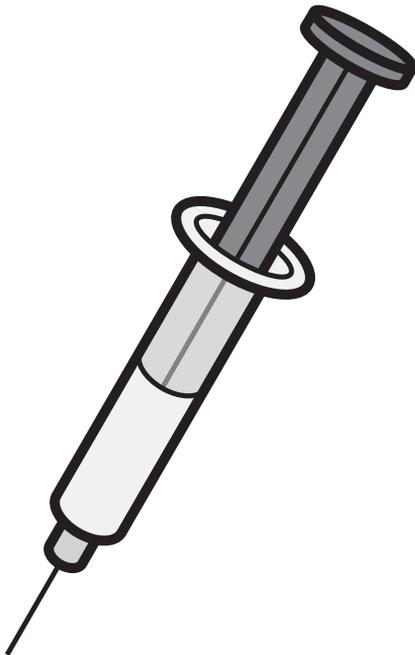
**Advantages:** The implant is one of the most effective birth control methods available. It's simple and easy to use, is always in place and lasts for 3 years. It doesn't interfere with sex. A person can use it without needing cooperation from a partner.

**Disadvantages:** Minor surgery is required to insert and remove the rod. The hormones are always in the body, whether the person is having sex or not. The implant causes few serious health risks for most people, but should not be used by people who have a history of liver disease, blood clots or breast cancer. It may cause spotting between periods, lighter periods, longer periods or no periods at all. It doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs.

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## Depo-Provera

- Depo-Provera is a shot of artificial hormones that must be injected by a health care provider.
- Like the hormones in birth control pills, the hormones in the shot stop the ovaries from releasing an egg each month and thicken the mucus in the cervix (the opening to the womb) so it's hard for sperm to enter the uterus.



**Effectiveness:** Depo-Provera is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy.

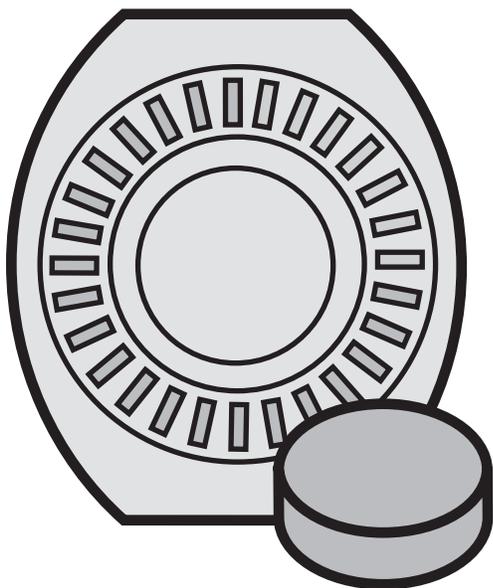
**Advantages:** Each Depo-Provera shot lasts 3 months. This method doesn't interfere with sex and often lessens the bleeding and cramping associated with periods. Depo-Provera is safe to use while breastfeeding and may reduce the chance of endometrial cancer (cancer of the lining of the uterus). A person can get the shot without needing cooperation from a partner.

**Disadvantages:** A person must see a health care provider regularly for shots. The shot causes few serious problems for most people. It may lead to weight changes or moodiness. It may cause heavy, light or irregular periods. Long-term use may temporarily reduce bone density in some people. A person who wants to get pregnant may not be able to for several months after stopping the shots. The shot doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs.

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## The Pill

- Birth control pills are small tablets made of artificial hormones. They prevent pregnancy by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month, and/or thickening the mucus in the cervix (the opening to the womb) so it's hard for sperm to enter the uterus. They must be prescribed by a health care provider.



**Effectiveness:** Birth control pills are more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy if they're used correctly. This means the person has to remember to take a pill regularly and not miss any days. If the pills are forgotten or not used correctly, the effectiveness drops to 92%.

**Advantages:** Birth control pills are simple and easy to use, as long the person remembers to take them daily. They don't interfere with sex. They can lessen the bleeding and cramping of heavy or painful menstrual periods and reduce the chances of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer (cancer of the lining of the uterus). A person can use birth control pills without needing cooperation from a partner.

**Disadvantages:** Birth control pills must be taken every day whether the person is having sex or not. A person needs to be on the pill for about a month before being protected. The pill causes few serious problems in young people, but its use is associated with a small chance of high blood pressure, blood clots, heart attack, and stroke, especially for people who smoke, so people who use the pill should get regular checkups. In some people use of the pill can lead to weight changes, moodiness and spotting between periods. The pill doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs.

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## The Patch

The birth control patch is a thin plastic square that slowly releases artificial hormones into the body. The patch can be worn on the skin of the buttocks, stomach, upper outer arm or upper torso (but not on the breasts). A new patch is applied each week. It prevents pregnancy by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month, and/or thickening the mucus in the cervix (the opening to the womb) so it's hard for sperm to enter the uterus. It must be prescribed by a health care provider.



**Effectiveness:** The patch is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy when it's used correctly. This means the person has to remember to wear the patch and to change it each week. If the patch is forgotten or not used correctly, the effectiveness drops to 92%.

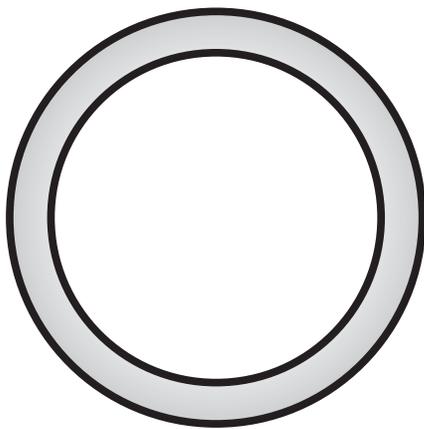
**Advantages:** The patch is simple and easy to use, as long as the person remembers to wear it and change it weekly. It doesn't interfere with sex. It can lessen the bleeding and cramping of heavy or painful menstrual periods. A person can use the patch without needing cooperation from a partner.

**Disadvantages:** The patch must be worn every day, whether the person is having sex or not. A person needs to use the patch for about a month before being protected. Like the pill, the patch causes few serious health risks for young people, but its use may be associated with a small chance of high blood pressure, blood clots, heart attack and stroke, especially for people who smoke, so people who use the patch should get regular checkups. In some people, use of the patch can lead to weight changes, moodiness and spotting between periods. The patch doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs.

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## The Ring

The vaginal ring is a soft, flexible ring inserted into the vagina that slowly releases artificial hormones into the body. The ring is changed once a month. It prevents pregnancy by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month, and/or thickening the mucus in the cervix (the opening to the womb) so it's hard for sperm to enter the uterus. It must be prescribed by a health care provider.



**Effectiveness:** The ring is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy when it's used correctly. This means the person has to remember to insert the ring and to change it each month. If the ring is forgotten or not used correctly, the effectiveness drops to 92%.

**Advantages:** The ring is simple and easy to use, as long as the person remembers to insert it and change it monthly. It doesn't interfere with sex. It can lessen the bleeding and cramping of heavy or painful menstrual periods. A person can use the ring without needing cooperation from a partner.

**Disadvantages:** The ring must remain in the vagina all the time, whether the person is having sex or not. A person needs to use the ring for about a month before being protected. Like the pill and the patch, the ring causes few serious health risks for young people, but its use may be associated with a small chance of high blood pressure, blood clots, heart attack and stroke, especially for people who smoke, so people who use the ring should get regular checkups. In some people, use of the ring can lead to weight changes, moodiness and spotting between periods. The ring doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs.

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## External (Male) Condom

An external or male condom is a thin latex or plastic sheath that fits over an erect penis to catch the semen when the person ejaculates (comes). It keeps the sperm from entering a partner's body.



**Effectiveness:** If external condoms are used very carefully every time a person has sex, they are 98% effective in preventing pregnancy. But if people aren't very careful every time, the effectiveness drops to 85%.

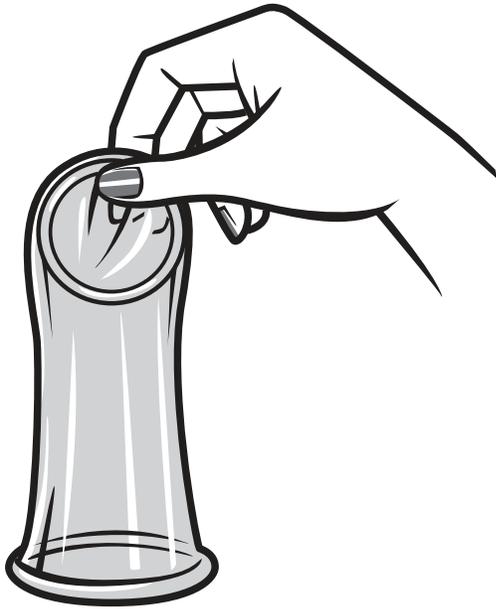
**Advantages:** Condoms can be bought in drugstores and online. Sometimes people can get them for free at family planning clinics. Anyone can buy them. They're easy to use and carry, so they can be readily available when needed. Partners can put the condom on together. Condoms help protect people from HIV and other STDs. Condoms come in different styles, so people can find one they like.

**Disadvantages:** Condoms must be put on during sex, and some couples find this difficult to do every time. Couples need to use a new condom every time they have sex. Some say a condom reduces sexual feelings. Some people are allergic to latex and should use a plastic condom. Condoms are easiest to use with a partner's cooperation.

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## Internal (Female) Condom

An internal or female condom is a soft, loose-fitting polyurethane (plastic) or nitrile sheath that lines the vagina. It keeps the sperm from entering the partner's body.



**Effectiveness:** If internal condoms are used very carefully every time a person has sex, they are 95% effective in preventing pregnancy. But if people aren't very careful every time, the effectiveness drops to 79%.

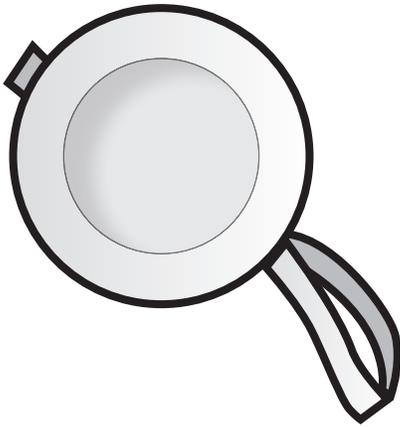
**Advantages:** Internal condoms are sold in drugstores, at clinics or online. Anyone can buy them. They're easy to use and carry. They can be used only when needed. A person can insert the condom up to 8 hours before having sex. Condoms help protect people from HIV and other STDs.

**Disadvantages:** The internal condom must be correctly inserted in the vagina before sex. Couples must be sure the penis is inserted inside the condom and not between the condom and the wall of the vagina. Couples need to use a new condom every time they have sex. Condoms are easiest to use with a partner's cooperation.

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## Sponge

The sponge works as a barrier and also contains spermicide (chemicals that kill sperm). It is put into the vagina before having sex.



**Effectiveness:** If it is used carefully every time, it is 80–91% effective in preventing pregnancy. If it is not used carefully every time, it is only 76–88% effective.

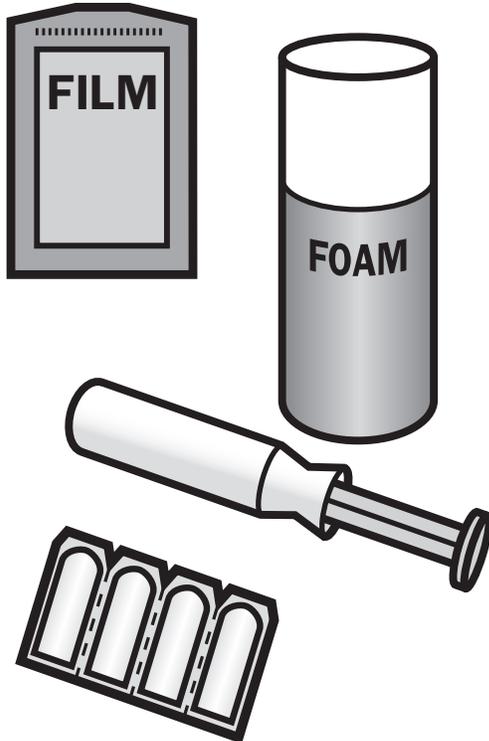
**Advantages:** Sponges can be bought in drugstores, at clinics or online. Anyone can buy them. They're easy to use and carry. They can be used only when needed. A person can insert the sponge up to 24 hours before having sex, and it can stay in the vagina for more than one act of intercourse.

**Disadvantages:** The sponge must be correctly inserted in the vagina before sex. It must be left in place at least 6 hours, but not more than 30 hours after having sex. It doesn't protect people from HIV or other STDs. The chemicals may irritate the vagina, which can increase the risk of urinary tract infections and HIV/STD transmission. There is also a risk of toxic shock syndrome if it is left in the vagina for more than 30 hours.

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## Foam, Suppositories & Film

These materials contain spermicides, chemicals that kill sperm. They are put into the vagina before having sex.



**Effectiveness:** If they are used carefully every time, they are 85% effective in preventing pregnancy. If they are not used carefully every time, they are only 71% effective.

**Advantages:** Like condoms, foam, suppositories and film can be bought in drugstores, at clinics and online. Anyone can buy them. They're easy to use and carry. They can be used only when needed. A person can insert them with or without help from a partner just before having sex.

**Disadvantages:** The material must be placed in the vagina just before sex. If too much time goes by before the couple has sex, more will have to be inserted. Foam can be messy, and the chemicals may irritate the vagina or penis. They don't protect people from HIV or other STDs.

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## Emergency Contraception

- Emergency contraception (EC) methods can be used to help prevent a pregnancy after unprotected sex. EC works best when it's used right away and no later than 3 to 5 days after sex.
- EC prevents pregnancy by stopping the egg from being released and/or by changing the lining of the uterus so the egg can't implant and grow. There are 2 types of emergency contraception available in the United States: emergency contraceptive pills, which contain artificial hormones, and the copper-T IUD, a device inserted into the uterus by a health care provider.
- Emergency contraception is *not* a regular method of birth control. It should be used only in an emergency, when a regular method of birth control has failed, or in cases of rape.

**Effectiveness:** When taken correctly and used no later than 3 to 5 days after sex, emergency contraceptive pills reduce the chances of pregnancy by 75 to 89%. The copper-T IUD reduces the chances of pregnancy by 99%.

**Advantages:** EC can lessen the chances of pregnancy if it's used within 5 days after having unprotected sex. Even people who can't use birth control pills on a regular basis may be able to use EC pills safely on a one-time, emergency basis. The IUD can be left in place for up to 10 years as a long-term method of birth control. Some kinds of EC pills are available at drug stores or online without a prescription.

**Disadvantages:** Some people have nausea and vomiting when they take EC pills. The IUD may cause increased menstrual bleeding, pain and/or cramps at first, and spotting between periods. Neither form of EC protects people from HIV or other STDs. EC cannot be used as a regular method of birth control.