

For Teens: Understanding Birth Control Options

If you are having sex or thinking about having sex, you need to think about birth control. Birth control helps prevent pregnancy. Even if you only have sex one time, you can get pregnant or get your partner pregnant. You can get birth control and advice at clinics, health centers, and some school-based health programs.

Remember, most types of birth control do not protect against sexually transmitted infections, or STIs.

Deciding to have sex is a big step. It is OK to ask questions and get help.

In most states, teens can get sexual health services privately, without their parents' permission. In some states, though, the care team can contact your parents if you are under 18. You can ask about the policy when you call for an appointment.

It is a good idea to talk to your parents about birth control, as long as you feel safe. Usually, parents just want to make sure you are safe and healthy. If you cannot talk to a parent, talk to another adult you trust. That could be a school nurse or care team member.

You are not alone. There are people who care and want to help you make safe choices.



Some Options for Birth Control

Condoms

- **What it is:** This is a thin cover worn on the penis, also called an external condom, or placed inside the vagina, called an internal condom.
- **How to use:** Use 1 condom every time you have sex. Never use 2 at once.
- **Warnings:** Learn how to use it properly. It only works if used correctly every time.
- **Side effects:** Some people are allergic to latex condoms. Those people can use non-latex condoms. Check the package label.
- **Other info:** You can buy condoms at drugstores or get them free from clinics. You do not need a prescription. Condoms are the only type of birth control that helps protect against most STIs.

Spermicide

- **What it is:** Spermicide is a gel, cream, foam, or film that kills sperm.
- **How to use:** Place it inside the vagina before sex.
- **Warnings:** It is not very effective when used alone. It works better when used with a condom or diaphragm.
- **Side effects:** It may cause irritation to either partner.

The Pill

- **What it is:** The birth control pill is taken every day to stop the body from releasing an egg. You need a prescription.
- **How to use:** Take it at the same time every day.
- **Warnings:** It is less effective if you forget a dose or take it late. Ask your care team what to do if you miss a pill.
- **Side effects:** It can cause nausea, sore breasts, and mood changes.
- **Other info:** You should be seen and examined by your care team before starting the pill.

Time-Release Hormones

These are hormones given in other ways besides a pill. They all require a prescription.

- **Patch:** It is worn on the skin and changed weekly.
- **Vaginal ring:** You put this inside your vagina for 3 weeks, then remove it for 1 week.
- **Shot:** A care team member gives this injection in the arm or buttock every 3 months.
- **Implant:** This is a small rod that your care team places under the skin of your arm. It lasts up to 3 years.
- **Warnings:** It can take time for your period to return after you stop using any kind of hormonal birth control.
- **Side effects:** Hormonal birth control can cause weight gain, mood changes, and irregular periods.
- **Other info:** You should be seen and examined by your care team before starting hormonal birth control.

Diaphragm or Cervical Cap

- **What it is:** It is a soft cup you place inside your vagina to block sperm.
- **How to use:** You must use it with spermicide and insert it before sex. It must stay in place for several hours after sex.
- **Warnings:** It must be sized and fitted by a care team member.
- **Side effects:** It can cause irritation or infection if not cleaned well.

Intrauterine Device, Also Called IUD

- **What it is:** This small T-shaped device is placed in the uterus.
- **How to use:** A care team member puts it in. It can last 3 to 10 years.
- **Warnings:** It is not a good choice if you or your partner has an STI.
- **Side effects:** It can cause cramps, irregular bleeding, or heavier periods.
- **Other info:** An IUD can be removed at any time by your care team.

Abstinence

- **What it is:** Abstinence means you choose not to have vaginal sex.

- **How to use:** If you do not have vaginal sex, there is no chance of pregnancy. Other types of sex can result in STIs.

Emergency Birth Control

- **What it is:** This pill is used after sex to prevent pregnancy.
- **How to use:** It works best within 3 days after having sex, but it may work up to 5 days after.
- **Warnings:** It is less effective than other methods. It is not for regular use.
- **Side effects:** It can cause nausea, headache, and spotting.
- **Other info:** Emergency birth control is available in generic form and under different brand names like Plan B One-Step®. Some forms are available over the counter for all ages. Some brands have age or other restrictions. You can ask your care team or a pharmacist for help choosing one.

Emergency birth control does not always work, and it is not the same as an abortion. It works best when you take it right after unprotected sex. It helps delay the release of an egg, but if the egg is already out, it may not stop a pregnancy.

It does not end a pregnancy that has already started. It also does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections, or STIs.

If you are worried or think you might be pregnant, talk to a trusted adult or your healthcare provider.

What to Do if You Did Not Use Birth Control

If you had sex and did not use birth control, or you had a problem with your birth control method, ask your care team what to do. Some general advice includes:

- **Condom:** Use emergency birth control if a condom was not used or broke during sex.
- **Pill:** Take it as soon as you remember. Use a backup birth control method like condoms for 7 days.
- **Shot or implant:** Ask your care team what to do if you are late for a shot or have other concerns.

- **IUD or ring:** If it falls out or you think it moved, call your care team right away.

Birth Control and STIs

STIs are sexually transmitted infections. These include chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, human papillomavirus or HPV, and HIV.

- Only condoms help protect against most STIs.
- Other types of birth control do not protect you from STIs.
- To lower your risk, use a condom every time you have sex.
- The HPV vaccine is very effective in preventing HPV and HPV-related cancers.

When to Contact Your Care Team

If you are sexually active, using birth control, or have used emergency birth control, call your care team if:

- You have heavy vaginal bleeding that soaks through a pad or tampon every hour for more than 2 hours.
- You have belly pain that does not go away or keeps getting worse.
- You vomit within 2 hours after taking an emergency contraceptive pill.
- Your period is more than 1 week late after using emergency contraception, or your next period is much lighter or heavier than usual.
- You have bad headaches that do not get better with over-the-counter medicine.
- You have unusual vaginal discharge, itching, or burning.
- You have any questions or concerns about your birth control or side effects.

When to Call 911 or Go to the Emergency Room

Get help right away if you have:

- Sudden, severe belly pain



- Severe chest pain, trouble breathing, or coughing up blood
- Sudden vision changes, loss of vision, or severe eye pain
- Sudden, severe headache with confusion, trouble speaking, or weakness on one side of your body
- Swelling, pain, or redness in one leg
- Fainting, passing out, or feeling like you might pass out

Thank You for Choosing Us

Thank you for trusting us with your care. We are here to support you and want you to feel your best. Contact us with any questions.

IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.

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