

FAQs

Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC): Intrauterine Device (IUD) and Implant

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Who can use IUDs and implants?

LARC methods are a safe and effective birth control choice for [teenagers](#) and adults of all ages. They are also good methods to use right after having a baby. (Read [Using LARC Right After Childbirth](#) to learn more.)

How effective are IUDs and implants?

The IUD and the implant are the most effective forms of reversible birth control available. During the first year of use, fewer than 1 in 100 women using an IUD or

implant will get pregnant. Over time, LARC methods are 20 times more effective than birth control pills, the patch, or the ring.

Do IUDs and implants protect against STIs?

The IUD and the implant do not protect against [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#), including [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#). Use a condom to provide STI protection if you are at risk of getting an STI. You are at risk of getting an STI if you

- have more than one sexual partner
- have a partner who has or has had more than one sexual partner
- have sex with someone who has an STI
- have a history of STIs
- use drugs

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Intrauterine
contraceptive
device (IUD)
What is an
IUD?

The IUD
is placed
in the
uterus.

1. The hormonal IUD releases the hormone [progestin](#) into the uterus. There are different brands of hormonal IUDs that last for different lengths of time. Depending on the brand, they are approved for up to 3 to 8 years of use.
2. The copper IUD releases copper into the uterus. This IUD does not contain hormones. It is approved for up to 10 years of use.

How does the IUD work?

The IUD works mainly by preventing [fertilization](#) of an [egg](#) by [sperm](#). The progestin in the hormonal IUD thickens mucus found in the [cervix](#). Thicker mucus makes it harder for sperm to enter the uterus and reach an egg. Progestin also thins the lining of the uterus.

The copper in the copper IUD interferes with sperm's ability to move. When sperm stop acting normally, it is harder for them to enter the uterus and reach an egg.

What are the benefits of the IUD?

The IUD has the following benefits:

- It is easy to use. Once it is in place, you do not have to do anything else to prevent pregnancy. It is effective for years.
- No one can tell that you are using birth control.
- It does not interfere with sex or daily activities. You can use a tampon with it.
- It can be inserted immediately after an abortion, a [miscarriage](#), or childbirth. It can be used while breastfeeding.

- Almost all women can use an IUD. They are safe for most women. If you are pregnant, you may need to wait until after you give birth to use an IUD. If you are breast-feeding, you can use an IUD. If you are not pregnant or breast-feeding, you can use an IUD right away.
- If you are having a miscarriage or an abortion, you can use an IUD right away. If you are having a vaginal birth, you can use an IUD right away. If you are having a cesarean birth, you can use an IUD right away. If you are having a hysterectomy, you can use an IUD right away.
- Over-the-counter birth control pills (OCs) and condoms can be used with an IUD. If you are bleeding more than usual, you may need to stop using OCs or condoms. If you are bleeding more than usual, you may need to stop using OCs or condoms.
- The IUD can be removed at any time. If you are having a hysterectomy, you can remove the IUD before the surgery. If you are having a hysterectomy, you can remove the IUD before the surgery.

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How is the IUD placed?

An [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) or other health care professional must place an IUD. Together you should discuss your medical history and you should have a [pelvic exam](#). The IUD is inserted after the pelvic exam. The IUD is guided through the [vagina](#) and the cervix and then into the uterus.

You may have a pregnancy test before the IUD is placed. If you are at risk of STIs, you may need STI tests either before placement or on the day of insertion.

When can the IUD be placed?

The IUD can be placed at any time during your [menstrual cycle](#) as long as it is reasonably certain that you are not pregnant and you do not have signs of an infection.

Will I feel anything when the IUD is placed?

Placement of the IUD may cause some temporary discomfort. Taking over-the-counter pain relief medication such as ibuprofen before or after placement may help.

The IUD has strings made of thin plastic threads. Your health care professional will use the strings to remove the IUD when you decide to stop using it. After placement, the strings are trimmed so that they extend just past the cervix into your vagina.

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How is the IUD removed?

When you are ready to stop using the IUD, your health care professional can remove it during a pelvic exam. The strings are grasped with an instrument and used to gently pull out the IUD. Removal of an IUD usually takes less time than placement.

What are possible side effects of using the IUD?

When you use an IUD, changes in menstrual bleeding are normal and not harmful. Some changes can be temporary and may go away as your body gets used to the IUD. Others may last for as long as you have the IUD. If you have changes in bleeding that concern

you, talk with your health care professional. Often, medications can help with some of the bleeding changes that happen with IUDs.

With the copper IUD, painful periods and bleeding may increase during the first months of use. Over-the-counter pain relievers may be used for pain and bleeding.

Hormonal IUDs may cause frequent spotting, more days of bleeding, and heavier bleeding in the first months of use. Over time, the amount of menstrual bleeding and the length of your menstrual period usually decrease. Menstrual pain also usually decreases. Sometimes the hormonal IUD causes menstrual bleeding to stop completely.

Other possible side effects include

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come out, or only part of it may come out. The risk is higher in teenagers, women with heavy menstrual bleeding, and women who have an IUD inserted immediately after childbirth. If the IUD comes out, it is no longer effective. You may be able to have a new IUD placed.

- The IUD can go through the wall of the uterus during placement. This usually does not cause any major health problems, but the IUD will need to be removed. This is rare and happens in only about 1 out of every 1,000 placements.
- **Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)** after IUD insertion happens very rarely. Using an IUD does not by itself increase the risk of PID. Women with an undiagnosed STI at the time of IUD insertion are more likely to develop PID than women without an STI. If you are at risk of STIs, you may be screened before you get an IUD.

- Rarely, pregnancy may occur while you are using an IUD. If pregnancy happens, and you wish to continue the pregnancy, the IUD should be removed if your health care professional can see the IUD in the cervix or if the strings are visible. If the IUD remains in place during pregnancy, there are increased risks of miscarriage and infection.
- In the rare case that a pregnancy happens with the IUD in place, there is a higher chance that it will be an [ectopic pregnancy](#). This is a serious condition that needs medical attention right away.

What are the signs of a problem with the IUD?

The following symptoms may be a sign of a problem with your IUD. A health care profes

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Birth Control Implant

What is the birth control implant?

The birth control implant is a flexible, plastic rod about the size of a matchstick that is inserted just under the skin in the upper arm. It releases progestin into the body. The implant is approved for up to 3 years of use.

Before choosing the implant, talk with your health care professional about any medications or supplements you are taking. Some medications can make the implant less effective.

How does the implant work?

The progestin in the implant prevents pregnancy mainly by stopping ovulation. The progestin in the implant also thickens the mucus of the cervix, which makes it harder for sperm to enter the uterus and reach the egg. Progestin also thins the lining of the uterus.

What are the benefits of the implant?

The implant has the following benefits:

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 - It reduces pain during your period.
 - If you wish to get pregnant or if you want to stop using it, you can simply have the implant removed.

How is the implant inserted?

A health care professional will insert the implant into your arm. A small area on the inside of your upper arm may be numbed with a local pain medicine. The implant is placed under the skin with a special inserter. The procedure takes only a few minutes.

You may have some mild bruising after the implant is inserted. Applying sterile gauze with a pressure bandage for 24 hours may reduce bruising.

When can the implant be inserted?

The implant can be inserted at any time during your menstrual cycle as long as it is reasonably certain that you are not pregnant.

How soon is the implant effective after placement?

The implant protects against pregnancy right away if it is placed within 5 days of the start of your menstrual period. If you have an implant inserted more than 5 days after the start of your menstrual period, avoid vaginal sex or use a birth control backup method such as a condom for the next 7 days

How is the implant inserted?

When you come to the office for your visit, the provider will insert the implant.

A small amount of local anesthesia is used to numb the area where the implant is made. This means you won't feel any pain. You will only feel pressure. It only takes about 10 minutes to insert the implant.

What are the side effects of the implant?

Like IUDs, implants can cause side effects. These side effects are usually temporary and go away over time. Some women experience side effects that last longer.

Most women experience lighter periods. Some women experience no periods at all. Other women experience periods that change completely. But in some cases, periods are more frequent and last longer. Other side effects may include

- digestive difficulties
- headaches
- breast pain
- weight gain
- acne

What are possible risks of using the implant?

Possible risks with use of the implant include the following:

- Problems with insertion or removal of the implant. These problems are rare.
- Although rare, if you get pregnant while the implant is inserted, there is a slightly increased risk of ectopic pregnancy. The implant should be removed if pregnancy occurs.

Glossary

Anesthetic: A medication used to prevent pain.

Birth Control Implant: A small rod that is inserted under the skin in the upper arm. The implant

Cervix

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Egg: A

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Fertilization: A multistep process that joins the egg and sperm.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): A virus that attacks certain cells of the body's immune system. If left untreated, HIV can cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Intrauterine Device [in-truh-YOO-tuhr-ruhn] (IUD): A small device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy, lighten or stop periods, or reduce the risk of endometrial cancer.

Menstrual Cycle: The monthly changes that prepare the body for a possible pregnancy. A menstrual cycle is defined as the first day of menstrual bleeding of one cycle to the first day of menstrual bleeding of the next cycle.

Miscarriage: Loss of a pregnancy that is in the uterus.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with medical and surgical training and education in the female reproductive system.

Ovulation: The time when an ovary releases an egg.

Pelvic Exam: A physical examination of the pelvic organs, including the vagina, cervix, uterus, and ovaries.

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Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus. Also called the womb.

Vagina: A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles. The vagina leads from the uterus to the outside of the body.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ184

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