

Contraception

What is contraception?

Contraception, also known as birth control, encompasses a group of methods and devices used to prevent unintended pregnancy. There are many highly effective options available, each with unique pros and cons. Which option you choose, if any, is a completely personal decision and should be guided by what is most important to you; for some women the goal is to experience fewer side effects, for others it's a less painful period.

How do I decide which option is best for me?

It is helpful to ask yourself (and your care provider) the following questions when evaluating whether a specific contraception method is right for you:

- Do you want to have children someday? How soon?
- How significant would an unplanned pregnancy be?
- Will you be able to use the birth control method correctly?
- What are the potential side effects?
- What are your periods like?
- How often do you have sex?
- How many sexual partners do you have?
- Do you have health conditions that impact your ability to take certain forms of birth control?
- How much control do you prefer over your birth control method? Some require a healthcare visit to stop.

What are my options?

Combined birth control pills are very commonly used to prevent pregnancy and manage symptoms of other health conditions such as PCOS, endometriosis and acne. The combined pills contain both estrogen and progestin (synthetic progesterone). These hormones help prevent pregnancy by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month. Each pack contains a one-month supply of daily pills. During the first 3 weeks you will take 'active' pills and during the fourth week you will take placebo pills that don't have hormones. You will get your period during your placebo week.

Progestin-only birth control pills are very similar to the combined pill, both in how they prevent pregnancy and in how you take them. There is, however, a lower dose of hormone and a lower risk of blood clots in the progestin-only pill in comparison with the combined pill. Women with high blood pressure, a history of blood clots, certain migraines or who smoke should opt for the progestin-only pill over the combined pill to reduce further risk of blood clots.

Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are an excellent long-term contraceptive option for women that don't want to manage the potential hassle of daily birth control pills. IUDs are tiny T-shaped devices, about the size of a quarter, and can be inserted during a quick in-office procedure. There are two types of IUDs, a copper version and a plastic version that contains the synthetic hormone progestin. Each type prevents pregnancy by stopping sperm from reaching the egg for fertilization.

The hormonal implant is a recent addition to the contraceptive options offered in Canada. The implant is a flexible plastic rod, about the size of a matchstick. It's inserted under the skin of your upper arm to deliver a constant supply of progestin for up to 3 years.

More than 15% of women aged 15 to 49 use birth control pills in Canada.²

Hormonal injections are another contraceptive option that contains the synthetic hormone progestin to suppress ovulation and thicken cervical mucus to prevent fertilization. These shots are given every 3 months by your care provider.

Condoms are the only method of contraception that both prevent pregnancy AND protect against sexually transmitted infections.

Other birth control methods include vaginal rings and sponges, diaphragms, cervical caps as well as spermicide gels and more natural methods such as fertility awareness and withdrawal (pull out method).

Comparing your options

	How to use	Effectiveness with average use	Important considerations
Combined pill	Use daily	93% effective	Small increased risk of blood clots.
Progestin-only pill	Use daily	93% effective	Needs to be taken at the same time each day within a tighter window than the combined pill.
IUD	Lasts 10 years	99% effective	Insertion can be uncomfortable or even painful. Unpredictable spotting for several months after insertion.
Implant	Lasts 3 years	99% effective	Unpredictable spotting for several months after insertion.
Injection	Get every 3 months	96% effective	Unpredictable spotting for several months after insertion It may take up to 10 months after stopping the injection to get pregnant.
Condoms	Use every time	87% effective	Can be inconvenient. Only method that provides protection against STIs.
Vaginal ring	Put in and take out once a month	93% effective	Can be challenging to remember to stay on track every month.





A closer look at birth control pills

How safe are birth control pills?

Birth control pills are generally very safe to use for most women. The type of birth control pill you choose (ie: combined vs. progestin-only) will depend on personal risk factors such as migraines, high blood pressure and smoking status. The combine pill carries a small increased risk of blood clots so women with additional risk factors as above, should opt for the progestin-only pill.

Some common side effects women experience:

- Nausea
- Decreased libido
- Tender breasts
- Changes in your period (early, late or stopping altogether)
- Headaches
- Spotting or 'breakthrough bleeding' between periods

Birth control pills can lead to positive side effects too! For example, the pill may help lessen symptoms of PMS, improve heavy menstrual bleeding and/or help clear up hormonal acne.

I just started taking birth control pills, how long will they take to work?

Birth control pills are usually not effective from the moment you start taking them. Depending on the type of pill you use and when in your cycle you start to take them, its best to use a backup birth control method - like condoms - for up to 7 days.

Combined pill

- If started within 5 days after the first day of your period, you will be protected from pregnancy right away
- If started at any other time of your cycle, protection from pregnancy begins after 7 days

Progestin-only pill

- Protection from pregnancy begins after 2 days (this may vary by brand)

I accidentally missed a pill - what do I do now?

What happens next depends on 3 factors: the number of pills you missed, the type of pill, and where you are in your cycle. If you miss a pill and don't know what to do, remember all pill packs will include instructions outlining exactly how to manage missed pills. You can also call your pharmacist to help walk you through what to do next. Below is a broad overview of how to proceed when you miss a pill but remember this may vary by brand so it's always best to read the brand guidance or call your pharmacist if you are unsure.

Missed combined pill

1 active pill

Take the missed pill ASAP, even if it means taking 2 in one day.

2+ active pills

Take 2 missed pills ASAP and use back up birth control until you have taken active pills for 7 days.

If missed during the first week of your cycle:

- ALSO consider emergency contraception

If missed during the third week of your cycle:

- ALSO skip your next placebo pill week

Missed progestin-only pill

1 active pill

Take the missed pill ASAP, even if it means taking 2 in one day. If you had unprotected sex in the last 5 days, consider emergency contraception and use back up birth control until you have taken pills for 2 days.



A closer look at IUDs

How safe are IUDs?

Most women can use IUDs safely, however there are some medical conditions that make side effects or complications more likely. IUDs may not be recommended to women with the following medical conditions:

Any IUD use:

- STIs
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- Cervical cancer
- Endometrial cancer

Specifically hormonal IUD use:

- Breast cancer
- Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)
- Antiphospholipid syndrome
- Liver disease

Specifically copper IUD use:

- Wilson's Disease
- Certain bleeding disorders

There are some risks associated with IUD use although serious health complications are very rare. The most common issue with IUDs is that they can move out of place. This is why women with IUDs are discouraged to use menstrual cups unless they are checking their IUD strings (see below) monthly. In some cases, the IUD may get stuck on or push through the wall of the uterus and require a special instrument or even surgery to remove it. If you begin to experience pain, flu-like symptoms, a change in vaginal discharge and/or bleeding after sex, book an appointment with your care provider right away.

What is an IUD insertion like?

Your IUD will be inserted by a doctor or nurse at their clinic. To begin, your provider will use a speculum to open the vaginal canal and visualize the cervix (similar to a pap test). Then, they will use a special inserter to put the IUD through the opening of your cervix and into your uterus. The entire process should take less than five minutes.

How do I prepare for my IUD insertion?

- Try to eat something before your appointment to avoid feeling faint during the insertion process
- Take 800mg of ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) about 20-30 minute before your appointment to help ease any cramping you may have during or after the insertion.
- Plan to take some time off if possible. IUD insertions can be painful, and some women may find their cramps are too severe to go to work or school for a day or so after the insertion.

What will the insertion feel like?

The IUD insertion process will be uncomfortable, but the degree of pain varies individually from moderate to severe. Speak to your care provider about pain management before the procedure to ensure the insertion process is as comfortable as possible.

What can I expect after an IUD insertion?

Some women feel perfectly fine following their IUD insertion, while others may need a few days to recover. Heating pads and over-the-counter pain medication are helpful ways to reduce cramping. It's common for women to experience regular spotting until their period starts to regulate, usually 3 to 6 months following insertion. The hormonal IUD eventually often makes periods lighter or even stops periods altogether. On the other hand, the copper IUD tends to make periods heavier, at least for the first few months.

I just had an IUD inserted...

How soon am I protected from pregnancy?

- You are protected from pregnancy immediately following your IUD insertion.

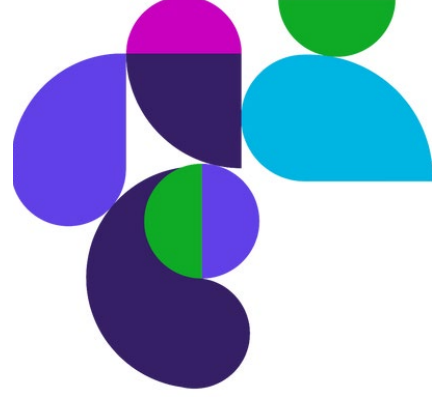
How soon am I allowed to have sex?

- You can have sex as soon as you want after getting an IUD.

How do I check my IUD strings?

Your IUD sits in the cervix with strings extending into the vagina. These strings allow for easy removal when you decide to take your IUD out. Here is a quick step-by-step on how to check your IUD strings:

1. Wash your hands.
2. Find a comfortable place to sit or squat.
3. Insert your middle or index finger into your vagina
4. Feel for the strings coming out of your cervix



Emergency Contraception

When should I take emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception, often referred to as 'the morning after pill' or 'plan B' can be used to prevent pregnancy in women who have had unprotected sex, missed birth control pills, and/or whose birth control method has failed.

There are two types of emergency contraception: the emergency contraceptive pill (ie: Plan B) and the copper IUD. Emergency contraceptive pills should be taken within 5 days (120 hours) of unprotected sex. The sooner it is used, the better the chances of preventing unwanted pregnancy. The copper IUD is the most effective form of emergency contraception if inserted up to 7 days after unprotected sex.

Where do I get emergency contraception?

You can get emergency contraception, such as Plan B or Next Choice without a prescription at most drugstores and sexual health clinics across Canada.

How effective is emergency contraception?

When used as directed, emergency contraception reduces the risk of pregnancy by 87 to 99%.

How can Teladoc Health help?

If you have questions about contraception or are considering changing methods of contraception, our [Find a Doctor](#) service can locate a general practitioner or gynecologist who can counsel you on which option best suits your health goals.

If you are looking for information on emergency contraception, our [Personal Health Navigator](#) service can help you locate available resources.

This guide is not meant to provide medical advice or service and should not be construed as the professional advice of Teladoc Health. As such, Teladoc Health does not guarantee or assume responsibility for the correctness of the information or its applicability regarding any specific factual situation. Personal health problems should be brought to the attention of physicians and appropriate health care professionals.

©Teladoc Health, Inc. All rights reserved.

- 1 Parenthood, Planned. "Birth Control Methods & Options: Types of Birth Control." Planned Parenthood, Planned Parenthood, www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.
- 2 Canadian Cancer Society / Société canadienne du cancer. "All about the Birth Control Pill." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/understand-hormones/all-about-the-birth-control-pill. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.
- 3 "Emergency Contraception." Emergency Contraception | Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, www.actioncanadashr.org/sexual-health-hub/emergency-contraception. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.

Learn more at TeladocHealth.ca

About Teladoc Health: Teladoc Health is empowering all people everywhere to live healthier lives by transforming the healthcare experience. Recognized as the world leader in whole-person virtual care, Teladoc Health leverages clinical expertise, advanced technology and actionable data insights to meet the evolving needs of consumers and healthcare professionals.

© Teladoc Health, Inc. All rights reserved.