

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONTRACEPTION

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What Is Contraception?

Contraception, or birth control, is any method or medicine that prevents pregnancy.

## Do I Need It?

Consider using birth control if:

- You are or may become sexually active and do not wish to become pregnant.
- You have heavy, painful periods or irregular periods. Some birth control options can help regulate your cycles. It may also lighten your period and help with premenstrual symptoms or acne.
- You take certain medications or have medical conditions that would be complicated by pregnancy.

## What Are the Different Kinds?

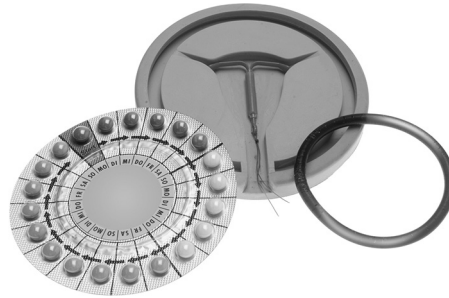
Many types of birth control are available, such as:

- **Barrier methods.** This type of birth control requires you or your partner to use it every time you have sex. Examples include condoms (which also protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV) and diaphragms.
- **Short-acting reversible contraception.** These methods are made of hormones. Depending on the type, you will need to take them daily, monthly, or every 3 months. They come in different forms, including pills, patches, vaginal rings, and shots.
- **Long-acting reversible contraception (“LARC”).** This type may or may not include hormones. It is inserted by your health care provider 1 time. Depending on the method, it can work for 3 to 10 years and can include intrauterine devices (IUDs) and implants under the skin of your arm.
- **Male or female sterilization.** These are permanent and are done via surgery or a medical procedure.
- **Withdrawal method.** This is when the penis is removed from the vagina before ejaculation. This method has a high failure rate and is generally not recommended.

Your doctor or other clinician can help you select which method is right for you on the basis of your lifestyle and health history.

## What Type Is Most Effective for Preventing Pregnancy?

The type of birth control you use and the extent to which you use it properly will influence how



effective it is at preventing pregnancy. Any type of birth control is more effective than no birth control. To reduce your risk for sexually transmitted infection, use condoms in combination with other methods.

## What Is “Emergency Contraception”?

Emergency contraception, sometimes known as “EC” or the “morning-after pill,” is any form of birth control used after sex to prevent pregnancy. It is most effective when used soon after sex but can be effective up to 5 days after sex.

## What Are Some of the Side Effects?

Side effects depend on the type of birth control used and can include irregular bleeding or spotting between periods, cramping, and modest weight gain.

## Are There Risks?

Birth control is generally safe, but certain methods carry risks. Talk to your doctor about your individual risk factors.

## Questions for My Doctor

- Should I use birth control?
- Which birth control method best fits my lifestyle?
- What are the side effects?
- What are the risks?
- What is the estimated monthly cost of this birth control?
- Is it covered by my insurance?

## For More Information



American College of Physicians  
Leading Internal Medicine, Improving Lives

### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/birthcontrol.html>

### Planned Parenthood

[www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control)