

Birth Control Options: Which One is Right for Me??

With so many birth control methods to choose from, ranging in price, effectiveness, and ease of use, it's easy to get overwhelmed. This fact sheet is designed to give you a quick overview of your options. Please remember that it's still important to talk to a clinician to learn how to use each method properly and safely. For more information, schedule an appointment with a trained peer educator, clinician or primary care provider.

Hormonal Options

Hormonal options provide continuous protection. They are available by prescription only. They prevent pregnancy by thickening cervical mucus and thinning the endometrium; some also prevent ovulation. Hormonal methods do not protect against STIs.

Combined Oral Contraceptives ("the pill")

- Contain estrogen and progestin
- Take a pill every day around the same time for 3 weeks, take placebo pills for the 4th week

Progestin-only pills ("mini-pill")

- Contain only progestin
- Take a pill every day at the exact same time

NuvaRing (flexible plastic vaginal ring)

- Contains estrogen and progestin
- Insert ring into vagina, keep in for 3 weeks. Remove ring for the 4th week

OrthoEvra Patch (beige plastic square worn on skin)

- Contains estrogen and progestin
- Replace patch each week for 3 weeks, remove it for the 4th week

Depo-Provera shot (injection given by a clinician)

- Contains only progestin
- Effective for 3 months

Nexplanon/Implanon (Implant) (thin flexible plastic device inserted under the skin by a clinician)

- Contains only progestin
- Effective for up to 3 years

Mirena IUD (plastic device inserted into the uterus by a clinician)

- Contains only progestin
- Lasts for up to 5 years

Skyla IUD (plastic device inserted into the uterus by a clinician)

- Contains progestin
- Lasts for up to 3 years
- Smaller in size than Mirena and Paragard IUDs

Non-Hormonal Options

Non-hormonal options have fewer side effects, and can be used only when needed.

Traditional "Male" Condom (latex or polyurethane sheath placed over the penis)

- Also protects against STIs
- Inexpensive and available over the counter
- Wide variety available

Insertive "Female" Condom (polyurethane pouch placed inside the vagina)

- Also protects against STIs
- Available over the counter
- Can be inserted in advance

The Sponge (foam sponge with spermicide that covers the cervix)

- Available over the counter
- Can be inserted up to 24 hours in advance

Diaphragm (latex cup that covers the cervix)

- Must be used with spermicide
- Can be inserted in advance
- Can be reused for 2 years
- Available by prescription only, must be sized

FemCap and **Lea's Shield** (silicone cups that cover the cervix)

- Must be used with spermicide
- Can be inserted in advance
- Can be reused for 6 months – 2 years
- Available by prescription only

Paragard IUD (plastic and copper device inserted into the uterus by a clinician)

- Lasts for up to 12 years
- Available by prescription only

Emergency Contraception

Plan B is available without a prescription. Ella is available by prescription for EC use. Women can also use some brands of regular birth control pills for emergency contraception. (see <http://ec.princeton.edu/>). Plan B One Step also referred to as emergency contraception (EC) consists of a hormonal contraceptive pill taken within 5 days after unprotected sex. The sooner EC is taken, the more effective it is (75-89% effective within 3 days). It's a good idea for every woman to keep EC on hand in case of an emergency (e.g. the condom broke, you forgot a pill or you were forced to have unprotected sex). Women and men can purchase Plan B One Step, a progestin-only EC, over the counter

Questions to consider when choosing birth control:

- How effective will it be? See chart below.
- How will it fit with your lifestyle?
 - Do you have an established daily routine? This can make it easier to remember to take a pill at the same time each day, for instance.
 - How many sexual partners do you have? Are you in a mutually monogamous relationship?
 - How involved does your sex partner want to be with contraception?
- How convenient will it be?
 - How often do you have sex? Some methods require action each time you have sex (e.g. diaphragm), while other methods are continuous (e.g. oral contraceptives).
 - How comfortable are you with touching your genitals? Some methods require this (e.g. hormonal ring, diaphragm).
- How safe will it be?
 - All methods can have side effects, and some can be inappropriate for people with a certain medical history. Newer methods may have less data on long-term side effects.
- How affordable will it be?
 - Consider how often it will be used, and how long it lasts. For instance, condoms are cheap but you have to use one every time, while an IUD is expensive but lasts 5-12 years. Also consider whether insurance covers part of the cost (e.g. for prescription methods).
- How reversible will it be?
 - Most college students want a non-permanent form of birth control, but this is a spectrum. For instance, IUDs last 3-10 years.
- Will it protect against sexually transmitted infection
 - Only condoms (traditional and insertive) can protect against STIs.

Contraceptive Effectiveness Rates

Contraceptive effectiveness rates are shown below for “perfect” users and “typical” users. The rates are shown as the percent of women using the method who *do not* get pregnant within one year. Perfect users use the method “perfectly”, following all instructions correctly and consistently. Typical users include those who do not use the method perfectly, e.g. forgetting to take a birth control pill or inserting the diaphragm incorrectly.

Method	Typical User	Perfect User
Intrauterine Devices (IUDs): Paragard, Mirena, and Skyla	99.2 - 99.9%	99.4 - 99.9%
Hormonal Methods:		
Combined Pill, Mini-pill, Nuvaring, Ortho-Evra patch	92 - 95%	99.5 - 99.9%
Depo-Provera Shot and Implant	97 - 99.9%	99.7 - 99.9%
Non-Hormonal Methods:		
Traditional “Male” Condom	88%	98%
Traditional Condom when used with vaginal spermicide	N/A	98-99%
Insertive “Female” Condom	79%	95%
Diaphragm, FemCap, Lea’s Shield, Sponge	84 - 86%	90 - 94%
No Method	15%	15%