

Birth Control Options: Choosing the Method That's Right for You

This resource is focused on the use of contraceptive methods for pregnancy prevention. Many of the methods listed are also used to manage other health conditions such as problems with menstrual cycles. Be sure to ask your health care provider if you have questions. All methods shown are covered by the VA.

METHODS AVAILABLE WITHOUT A PRESCRIPTION

Method	Risk of Pregnancy?	How is it used?	How often is it used?	What are menstrual side effects?	Other possible side effects?	Other things to consider?	What hormones does it use?
Pill (Progestin-only)	8 out of 100	Take by mouth	Every day at the same time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotting Irregular periods Lighter periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Breast tenderness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on type, available over-the-counter or with a prescription May reduce period cramps Lowers risk of uterine cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progestin
External Condom	13 out of 100	Put over penis	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allergic reaction Irritation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevents STIs 	No hormones
Fertility awareness-based methods	15 out of 100	Monitor fertility signs and abstain or use condoms on fertile days	Every day	None	No side effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works best with regular, predictable periods 	No hormones
Withdrawal (pulling out)	20 out of 100	Pull penis out of vagina before ejaculation	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	No side effects		No hormones
Internal condom	21 out of 100	Put in vagina	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allergic reaction Irritation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevents STIs 	No hormones
Spermicide	21 out of 100	Put in vagina	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allergic reaction Irritation 		No hormones

METHODS THAT REQUIRE A PRESCRIPTION FROM A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

Method	Risk of Pregnancy?	How is it used?	How often is it used?	What are menstrual side effects?	Other possible side effects?	Other things to consider?	What hormones does it use?
Pill (Progestin-only)	8 out of 100	Take by mouth	Every day at the same time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotting Irregular periods Lighter periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Breast tenderness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on type, available over-the-counter or with a prescription May reduce period cramps Lowers risk of uterine cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progestin
Pill (Combined)	7 out of 100	Take by mouth	Every day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cause temporary spotting Periods may become lighter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Breast tenderness Risk for blood clots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May improve acne May reduce period cramps Lowers risk of ovarian and uterine cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estrogen Progestin
Ring	7 out of 100	Put in vagina	Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cause temporary spotting Periods may become lighter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Breast tenderness Risk for blood clots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May improve acne May reduce period cramps Lowers risk of ovarian and uterine cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estrogen Progestin
Patch	7 out of 100	Put on skin	Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cause temporary spotting Periods may become lighter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Breast tenderness Risk for blood clots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May improve acne May reduce period cramps Lowers risk of ovarian and uterine cancer Not used for people with body mass index (BMI) ≥ 30 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estrogen Progestin
Shot ("Depo")	4 out of 100	Shot in arm, hip or under the skin (in a health care provider's office or on your own at home)	Every 3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotting Irregular periods Lighter or no periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May cause weight gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May reduce period cramps May cause delayed return to fertility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progestin
Diaphragm (with spermicide)	17 out of 100	Put in vagina with spermicide	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allergic reaction Irritation 		No hormones
Vaginal Gel	14 out of 100	Put in vagina	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allergic reaction Irritation 		No hormones
Cervical Cap	29 out of 100	Put in vagina with spermicide	Every time there is vaginal penetrative sex	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allergic reaction Irritation 		No hormones

METHODS THAT REQUIRE AN IN-PERSON VISIT WITH A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

Method	Risk of Pregnancy?	How is it used?	How often is it used?	What are menstrual side effects?	Other possible side effects?	Other things to consider?	What hormones does it use?
Implant	<1 out of 100	Placed under skin in upper arm	Lasts up to 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotting Irregular periods Lighter or no periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discomfort with placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May reduce period cramps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progestin
Hormonal IUD	<1 out of 100	Placed inside uterus	Lasts 3 to 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotting Lighter or no periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discomfort with placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May reduce period cramps Lowers risk of uterine cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progestin
Copper IUD	<1 out of 100	Placed inside uterus	Lasts up to 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May cause heavier, longer periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discomfort with placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May increase period cramps Lowers risk of uterine cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No hormones
Tubal sterilization	<1 out of 100	Outpatient surgical procedure	Once	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could have pain, bleeding, or infection related to the procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No hormones
Vasectomy	<1 out of 100	In-clinic procedure	Once	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could have pain, bleeding, or infection related to the procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No hormones

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Method	Risk of Pregnancy?	How is it used?	How often is it used?	What are menstrual side effects?	Other possible side effects?	Other things to consider?	What hormones does it use?
Plan B Emergency Contraception	1-7%	Take by mouth	ASAP after unprotected sex (most effective within 3 days but can use up to 5 days after sex)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have spotting or period at new time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Nausea • Breast tenderness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less effective for people who weigh >165 pounds • Available over-the-counter or by prescription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progestin
Ella Emergency Contraception	1-2%	Take by mouth	ASAP after unprotected sex (within 5 days)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have spotting or period at new time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Nausea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less effective for people who weigh >195 pounds • Available by prescription only 	No hormones
IUD	<1%	Placed inside the uterus	Within 5 days of unprotected sex	Depends on IUD type	Depends on IUD type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective regardless of weight 	Depends on IUD type



MyPath

Scan to check out MyPath and get more info about birth control, pre-pregnancy health and other reproductive health topics!

