



# Contraceptive Methods

which  
one is best  
for me?



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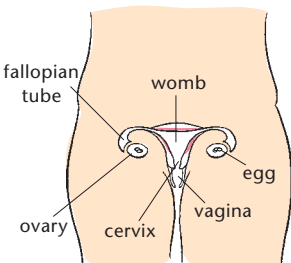
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# What Are Contraceptive Methods?

Every sexual intercourse can result in a pregnancy. Contraceptive (or birth control) methods help to prevent unwanted pregnancies. If you are not ready for children, choose a contraceptive method that suits your needs.

## How does a pregnancy occur?



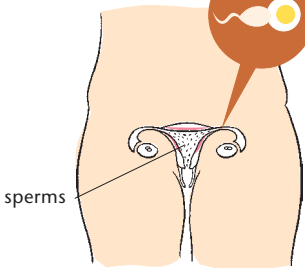
*Womb prepares to receive fertilised egg*

In a woman, an egg is released from one of her two ovaries about once every month. This is called **ovulation**. The egg is picked up by the fallopian tube and travels through it towards the womb. Meanwhile, the lining of the womb thickens to prepare to receive a fertilised egg.

## 2 What are Contraceptive Methods?



fertilisation



*Fertilisation occurs when a sperm meets the egg*

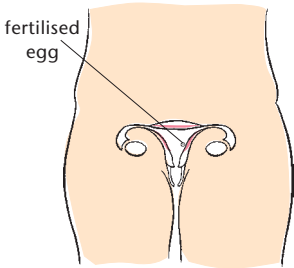
During sexual intercourse, the man deposits sperms in the vagina. These sperms travel into the womb and into the fallopian tubes. When one of the sperms unites with the released egg in the fallopian tube, **fertilisation** occurs.

The fertilised egg or embryo then travels and implants itself into the womb lining and continues to develop to become a foetus. The woman is now pregnant.

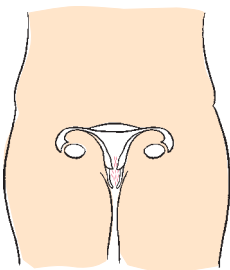
It is important to note that a man's pre-ejaculatory fluid may contain enough sperms to enter the vagina. Hence any contact between the penis and the vagina before ejaculation may result in pregnancy.

If the released egg is not fertilised, it disintegrates within 1-2 days. The thickened lining of the womb is shed and bleeding occurs. This is called **menstruation** and it marks the start of a new menstrual cycle and another chance to conceive. The possibility of conceiving with unprotected intercourse is 20% per cycle and 90% after a year.

The following sections will give you more information on the different types of contraceptive methods and how they can help you prevent unwanted pregnancies.



*Fertilised egg implants into the womb*



*Thickened lining sheds & bleeding occurs*

# Natural Methods

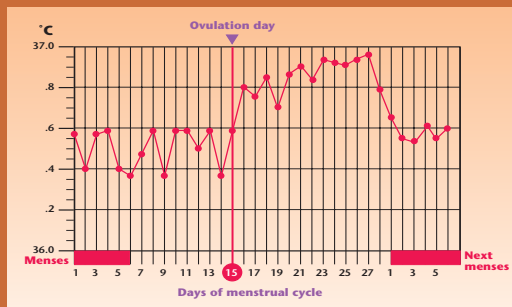
Natural methods (also known as safe periods or natural family planning methods) prevent pregnancy by not having sexual intercourse during a woman's fertile periods, i.e. during ovulation. The woman estimates when her egg is going to be released and avoids sexual intercourse during these unsafe periods.

## How do the methods work?

The methods work by estimating as accurately as possible the date a woman ovulates. There are a few ways to estimate the date of a woman's ovulation.

### Temperature Method

- 1 The woman takes her basal body temperature (BBT) first thing every morning using an ovulation thermometer. BBT is the body temperature of a person at complete rest. A woman's BBT rises by 0.2–0.4°C after ovulation.
- 2 She must not have sexual intercourse from the first day of her menstrual cycle till after she records a rise in her BBT for three consecutive days.



BBT changes in a menstrual cycle

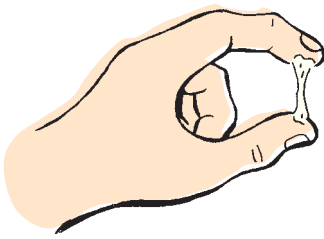


- 3 She can have intercourse from the fourth day after this rise to the start of the next menstruation.
- 4 To use this method, the woman must:
  - ♀ take and chart her BBT reading every day to see the pattern of her menstrual cycle
  - ♀ not have a fever as her BBT readings will not be reliable for that month.

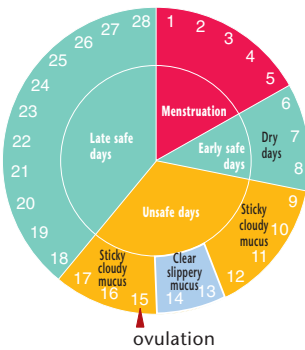
Sometimes the temperature change may not be obvious and that limits the usefulness of this method.

### Mucus/Billings Method

- 1 A woman’s cervical mucus changes during her menstrual cycle. During the first few days of menstruation, there is hardly any mucus. These days are safe for sexual intercourse as ovulation is most unlikely.
- 2 After the first few days, the woman may have thick or sticky, cloudy or yellowish mucus that does not stretch. When this happens, she should not have sexual intercourse.
- 3 A few days later, the mucus becomes clearer, feels slippery and can be stretched between two fingers. The last day of this type of mucus is called the peak day and coincides with ovulation. On this day, the mucus is the most stretchable.
- 4 After that, the mucus becomes less and sticky again. The woman can resume intercourse from the fourth day after the peak day.
- 5 To use this method, the woman must be able to:
  - ♀ identify the different types of mucus and understand her own menstrual pattern
  - ♀ distinguish mucus from semen, vaginal medications, discharges caused by vaginal infection and lubrication that comes with sexual arousal.



Fertile mucus



Mucus changes in a menstrual cycle

## Symptothermal Method

- ❶ This method uses a combination of natural methods to estimate more accurately a woman’s date of ovulation, e.g. a woman may compare her calendar information with her BBT chart and cervical mucus for a more accurate estimate.
- ❷ The symptothermal method is particularly useful if the woman has irregular menstrual cycles.

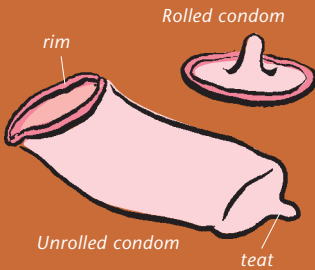
<b>NATURAL METHODS</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<p>♀ Better than not using any method but is generally deemed not very reliable.</p> <p>♀ Best used with other contraceptive methods such as the condom or the diaphragm.</p>
	<b>Advantages</b>	<p>♀ Can be used by a woman, who for some reasons, cannot use other contraceptive methods.</p>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<p>♀ Couple must not have sexual intercourse during unsafe periods.</p> <p>♀ Woman needs to make daily recordings/observations.</p> <p>♀ Not very reliable as a woman’s ovulation can be affected by anxiety, stress or illness.</p>

### REMINDER

- ✓ **Natural methods are effective for a woman who has regular menstrual cycles.**
- ✓ **Use natural methods with other contraceptive methods such as the condom or the diaphragm.**

# Barrier

## Methods



### Condom

The condom is a thin, rubber sheath worn (during sexual intercourse) on the man's erect penis to prevent sperms from entering the vagina.

#### How does it work?

It works as a physical barrier to contain the ejaculated sperms. This prevents sperms from meeting the woman's egg. **The condom must be worn before any contact is made between the penis and the vagina. Sperms can enter the vagina and cause a pregnancy even when the penis is just touching the vaginal opening.**

#### How is it used?

Using the condom correctly is very important to prevent pregnancy.

##### *Before sexual intercourse:*

- 1 Remove the condom from its packet carefully. Do not stretch or inflate the condom before use.
- 2 Put the condom on the erect penis before any contact with the vagina as the pre-ejaculatory fluid may contain enough sperms to cause a pregnancy.
- 3 Squeeze the teat lightly to let the air out from the condom. For a condom without a teat, leave a 2-cm space at the closed end and squeeze out the air. This is to prevent the condom from bursting or tearing when in use.



*Squeezing out air from the teat*



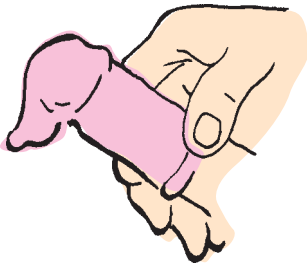


*Always apply spermicide on condom*

- 4 Next, unroll the condom to cover the **entire length** of the penis, otherwise the condom may slip off during intercourse.
- 5 Apply spermicide on the outside of the condom for more protection. Spermicides kill sperms and also act as lubricants. Do not use petroleum jelly as a lubricant as it will damage the rubber condom.

**After sexual intercourse:**

- 1 Withdraw the penis **immediately** after ejaculation. While doing so, hold on firmly to the rim of the condom. This is to prevent spilling semen into the vagina.
- 2 Wrap the used condom in a piece of tissue paper before discarding it. Each condom should be used only once.



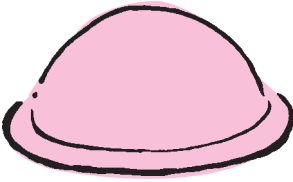
*Hold on to rim of condom when withdrawing*

<b>CONDOM</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♂ Good protection (75%) when used correctly.</li> <li>♂ 90% effective when used together with spermicide.</li> </ul>
	<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♂ Does not require a physical examination or a doctor's prescription.</li> <li>♂ Reversible method and simple to use.</li> <li>♂ Can be bought from clinics, pharmacies, supermarkets and petrol kiosks.</li> <li>♂ Offers protection against HIV /AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.</li> </ul>



### Disadvantages

- ♂ Sexual intercourse is interrupted as the man has to stop and put on the condom.
- ♂ Some people may be allergic to the rubber condom.



*Diaphragm*

## Diaphragm

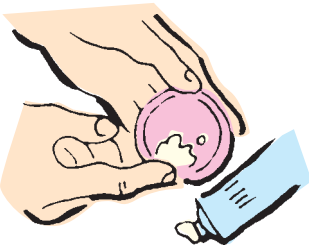
The diaphragm is a flexible, cup-shaped rubber device that is placed in the vagina.

### How does it work?

The diaphragm covers the woman's cervix and prevents sperms from entering the womb.

### How is it used?

- 1 The doctor will prescribe a correct size of the diaphragm after a vaginal examination and the woman will be taught how to insert and remove the diaphragm correctly.
- 2 She must apply spermicide over the entire diaphragm before sexual intercourse. If intercourse is to be repeated, she must insert a fresh dose of spermicide into the vagina, without removing the diaphragm.
- 3 The diaphragm must be left in the vagina for eight hours after intercourse to ensure that all sperms in the vagina are no longer alive.
- 4 The diaphragm should then be washed with soap, rinsed and dried. It must be replaced when there is a hole or defect, and must be checked for size yearly and after each pregnancy.



*Apply spermicide over surfaces of diaphragm*

<b>DIAPHRAGM</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ Good protection if inserted correctly.</li> <li>♀ 85% effective when used together with spermicide.</li> </ul>
	<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ Safe to use and can be inserted 2-3 hours before sexual intercourse.</li> <li>♀ No physical side-effects.</li> <li>♀ Fertility returns immediately with discontinued use.</li> </ul>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ May become dislodged before/during intercourse.</li> <li>♀ Must be left in place for eight hours after intercourse.</li> <li>♀ Some people may be allergic to the rubber diaphragm.</li> </ul>



*Various types of spermicides*

## Spermicide

Spermicides are chemicals that kill sperms. They come in the form of gel, aerosol foam, contraceptive film or foaming tablet. Spermicides are not very effective on their own and are commonly used with other contraceptive methods such as the condom or the diaphragm.

### How do they work?

Spermicides kill sperms that are ejaculated into the vagina during sexual intercourse.

### How are they used?

Spermicides can be inserted into the woman's vagina or used together with the condom or diaphragm.



**When used directly by the woman:**

- ❶ Apply the spermicide deep into the vagina to cover the entrance of the womb, about ten minutes before sexual intercourse.
- ❷ Apply a fresh dose of spermicide if intercourse is to be repeated.

**When used with the condom:**

- ❶ Apply the spermicide such as contraceptive gel, over the whole surface of the condom worn on the erect penis before sexual intercourse.

**When used with the diaphragm:**

- ❶ Apply contraceptive gel over the whole surface and rim of the diaphragm before inserting it into the vagina.
- ❷ Insert a fresh dose of spermicide into the vagina without removing the diaphragm, if sexual intercourse is to be repeated.

<b>SPERMICIDE</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ About 70% effective.</li> <li>♀ Should be used together with the condom or the diaphragm to increase effectiveness.</li> </ul>
	<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ Easy to use and also act as lubricants.</li> <li>♀ Can be bought from pharmacies.</li> </ul>

### Disadvantages

- ♀ Some women find it messy and troublesome to insert spermicide into the vagina.
- ♀ Once inserted, the woman must not get up and move about as the spermicide may leak out.
- ♀ Some people may be allergic to spermicides.

### REMINDER

- ✓ Always check the date of expiry before buying condoms and spermicides.
- ✓ Always put on a condom before penetration.
- ✓ Always use spermicide with a condom or a diaphragm.
- ✓ Apply a fresh dose of spermicide if sexual intercourse is to be repeated.
- ✓ Do not keep condoms in a wallet as rubber deteriorates with heat.
- ✓ Do not use petroleum jelly as a lubricant with the rubber condom or diaphragm.
- ✓ Do not douche immediately after sexual intercourse if spermicide is used. If a woman chooses to douche, she should do it after 6-8 hours.

# Hormonal Methods

The oral contraceptive pill, hormonal injection and implant contain the hormones progesterone and/or estrogen. The hormones prevent the release of eggs from a woman's ovaries. They also cause the cervical mucus to thicken which then acts as a barrier and prevents the sperms from entering the womb.

## Oral Contraceptive Pill

These are tablets containing synthetic hormones, either a combination of progesterone and estrogen or just progesterone. There are many brands of oral contraceptive pills, each with slight differences in the types and amounts of hormones. Contraceptive pills today contain very low doses of hormones to minimise side-effects.



*Different types of contraceptive pills*

## How is it used?

- 1 The woman takes one pill a day for 21 consecutive days, starting on the first day of her menstrual cycle. She then stops for seven days and starts a new packet of pills on the eighth day, whether or not the menses has stopped. This is repeated as long as pregnancy is to be prevented.
- 2 The pill should be taken at the same time every day. If the woman misses a pill, she should take the missed pill immediately (i.e. two pills for that day).

- 3 During a minor illness, she should continue taking the pill. She should consult her doctor when in doubt.
- 4 When a couple decides to have a baby, the woman should stop the pill for at least three months before she tries to conceive. This will allow her body enough time to return to its normal hormonal levels.

<b>COMBINED ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE PILL</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	♀ 99% effective if taken regularly and as instructed.
	<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ Effective, safe, easy to use and acceptable to most women.</li> <li>♀ Does not interfere with sexual intercourse.</li> <li>♀ Regulates the menstrual cycle and may improve skin texture.</li> </ul>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ The woman has to remember to take the pill at the same time every day.</li> <li>♀ May have temporary side-effects such as nausea, giddiness and headache. Spotting is common in the first few months but tend to improve with time. Weight gain is possible but not common with the newer preparations. She should consult her doctor if the side-effects persist.</li> </ul>



One injection every three months

## Contraceptive Injection

This is the injection of a synthetic progesterone hormone into the woman’s body. The injected hormone is slowly released into her body, providing protection against pregnancy for 12 weeks.

### How is it used?

The doctor will give the woman an injection every three months.

<b>CONTRACEPTIVE INJECTION</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	♀ Almost 100% effective.
	<b>Advantages</b>	♀ Safe, highly effective, long-lasting and easy to use. ♀ Does not interfere with sexual intercourse.
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	♀ Woman may have irregular menstrual cycles and may put on weight. ♀ Although this method does not affect fertility, it may take 6-12 months before a woman is able to conceive after her last injection.





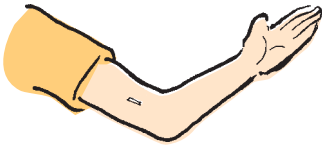
*Contraceptive implant*

## Contraceptive Implant

A synthetic progesterone hormone is implanted into the woman's body. The implanted hormone is slowly released into her body, providing protection against pregnancy for three years.

### How is it used?

The doctor inserts the implant (a small plastic rod about the size of a matchstick) under the skin of the inner upper arm. This procedure is done under local anaesthesia.



*Implant is inserted at inner surface of upper arm*

<b>CONTRACEPTIVE IMPLANT</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	♀ Almost 100% effective.
	<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ Highly effective, convenient and long-acting over a period of three years.</li> <li>♀ Fertility returns after the implant has been removed.</li> <li>♀ Woman loses less blood during her menstrual cycles.</li> </ul>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♀ Woman may experience irregular menstrual cycles, weight gain, acne and headaches.</li> <li>♀ Implants may cause some arm discomfort initially.</li> </ul>

### REMINDER

- ✓ **Consult your doctor when you experience side-effects after adopting any of the hormonal methods.**

# Intrauterine Device (IUD)



Multiload Copper IUD



Copper T IUD



Levonorgestrel IUD

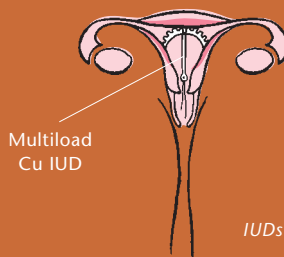
This is a small device that is inserted into the womb to prevent pregnancy. Commonly-used IUDs are the Multiload Copper IUD, Copper T IUD and Levonorgestrel IUD.

## How does it work?

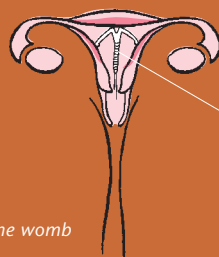
It is believed that the IUD prevents the fertilised egg from attaching to the wall of the womb (i.e. prevents implantation). In addition, Levonorgestrel IUD reduces heavy bleeding during menses compared to the other types of IUD. The Levonorgestrel IUD prevents excessive thickening of the womb lining and therefore lightens the period.

## How is it inserted?

- 1 The doctor inserts the IUD during or immediately after menstruation when a woman is unlikely to be pregnant.
- 2 The doctor will explain how to check for the IUD thread every month and advise the woman on the frequency of check-ups.



Multiload  
Cu IUD



Copper T  
IUD

IUDs in the womb

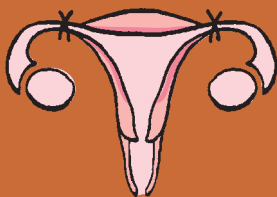
<b>INTRAUTERINE DEVICE</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	♀ 98% effective.
	<b>Advantages</b>	<p>♀ Safe, effective and readily reversible.</p> <p>♀ Long-lasting and can be left inside the womb for 2-5 years depending on the type used.</p> <p>♀ Does not interfere with sexual intercourse.</p>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<p>♀ Some women may experience heavier periods (except with Levonorgestrel IUD) and vaginal discharge. These symptoms usually disappear 2-3 months after insertion. It is common to have cramps immediately after insertion.</p> <p>♀ There is an increased risk of infection and hence more suitable for women in a stable relationship.</p>

**REMINDER**

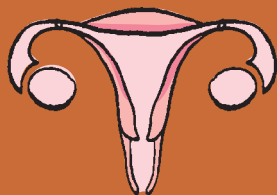
- ✓ The IUD is as safe as any other contraceptive method.
- ✓ Check for the IUD thread every month. If you cannot feel it, see your doctor.
- ✓ If you experience heavy menses and pain, see your doctor.
- ✓ The IUD is very effective in preventing a pregnancy in the womb. If you have an IUD and you are pregnant, please see your doctor immediately as the pregnancy may be outside the womb (ectopic pregnancy).

# Surgical Methods

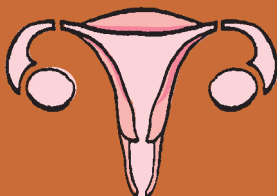
Both ligation and vasectomy are contraceptive methods that are not easily reversible and should only be considered by couples who have completed their families. Ligation is an operation to sterilise the woman while vasectomy is an operation to sterilise the man.



*Tubes tied*



*Tubes clipped*



*Tubes tied & cut*

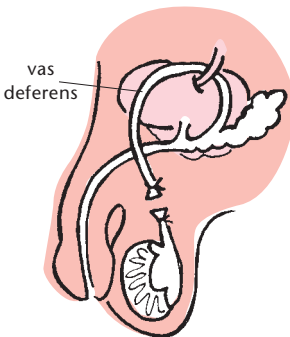
## Ligation

This is an operation where the fallopian tubes are cut or tied so that the egg is unable to travel down the tubes to meet the sperm, thus preventing fertilisation. This method is considered permanent and the couple must be sure that they do not want any more children.

## How is it done?

- 1 This procedure is done under general anaesthesia.
- 2 A small incision is made in the abdomen. The fallopian tubes are tied, clipped or tied and cut.
- 3 This operation is usually done as day surgery and does not require hospitalisation. Sexual intercourse can be resumed when the wound heals (usually within a week).
- 4 The operation can be done anytime but is best during menstruation when the woman is unlikely to be pregnant. It is important to continue using other reliable methods of contraception until after the operation. It can also be performed after a delivery or an abortion.

<b>LIGATION</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<p>♀ Very effective. Failure rate is one in 200 women.</p>
	<b>Advantages</b>	<p>♀ Operation is safe and simple.</p> <p>♀ No interference with normal bodily functions.</p> <p>♀ No hormonal side-effects - woman retains her femininity and continues to menstruate and ovulate.</p> <p>♀ Improves the sexual life of the couple as fear of unwanted pregnancies is removed.</p> <p>♀ No ill effect on health.</p>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<p>♀ Permanent - couple must be sure that they do not want any more children.</p>



*Tubes tied & cut*

## Vasectomy

This is an operation where the vas deferens are cut or tied so that the sperms are not released during ejaculation. This method is considered permanent and the couple must be sure that they do not want any more children.

### How is it done?

- ❶ This procedure is done under local anaesthesia.
- ❷ A small cut is made on both sides of the scrotum to reach the vas deferens. These tubes, which carry sperms, are then tied and cut.



- ③ He can resume sexual intercourse one week after the operation. But as sperms are still in the semen, the couple has to use another contraceptive method until all the sperms have been ejaculated. This takes about 10-15 ejaculations and semen examinations are recommended to ensure that there are no more sperms in the semen.

<b>VASECTOMY</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	♂ Very effective.
	<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♂ Operation is safe and simple.</li> <li>♂ No interference with normal bodily functions.</li> <li>♂ No hormonal side-effects - man retains his masculinity and virility, and can continue to ejaculate but there will be no sperms in the semen.</li> <li>♂ Improves the sexual life of the couple as fear of unwanted pregnancies is removed.</li> <li>♂ No ill effect on health.</li> </ul>
	<b>Disadvantages</b>	♂ Permanent - couple must be sure that they do not want any more children.

#### REMINDER

- ✓ Both ligation and vasectomy are permanent methods. The couple must be sure that they do not want any more children.
- ✓ There are no side-effects and the couple can continue to enjoy sex.

# Which Contraceptive to Use?

Having read about the different contraceptive methods, the next step is for both of you to decide which method best suits your needs. See your family doctor for more information and advice on choosing a method that is right for you.

Abortion is **not** a contraceptive method. It is a procedure to terminate a pregnancy that has already occurred. It should not be used as a contraceptive method. Repeat abortions can damage a woman's womb and affect her ability to have children in the future. So, use a reliable method to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ✓ See your family doctor.
- ✓ Call HealthLine:

**1800 223 1313** (personal advice during office hours)

**1800 848 1313** (24-hour pre-recorded health information).



## A Quick Look at Common Contraceptives

CONTRACEPTIVE METHOD	WHAT IS IT?	HOW DOES IT WORK?	HOW IS IT USED?	HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT?	WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?	WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES?
<b>Natural Methods</b>	Not having sexual intercourse during woman's fertile periods, i.e. during ovulation.	Prevents sperm & egg from meeting.	Woman must record menstrual cycles to determine her fertile period.	Not very reliable. Depends on regularity of woman's menstrual cycles. Should be used with condom or diaphragm.	Used by women who cannot use other contraceptive methods.	Couple must not have sexual intercourse during fertile periods. Daily recordings/observations needed.
<b>Condom</b>	A thin, rubber sheath worn over erect penis during sexual intercourse.	Prevents sperms from entering vagina to fertilise egg.	Unroll over erect penis before any contact is made. Must be withdrawn together with penis immediately after ejaculation.	Good protection (75%) when used correctly. 90% effective when used with spermicide.	No prescription needed. Highly reversible & simple to use.	Sexual intercourse interrupted. Possible allergy to rubber.
<b>Diaphragm</b>	A flexible, cup-shaped device made of rubber.	Covers entrance to womb (cervix) & prevents sperms from entering womb.	Fitted by doctor, inserted by user. Diaphragm must be checked for size yearly & after each pregnancy.	Good protection when inserted correctly. 85% effective when used with spermicide.	Safe to use & no physical side-effects. Highly reversible.	Must be left in vagina for eight hours after sexual intercourse. Possible allergy to rubber.
<b>Spermicide</b>	Chemicals that kill sperms.	Kills sperms.	Insert into vagina before sexual intercourse or apply on condom or diaphragm.	70% effective on its own. Should be used with condom or diaphragm.	Easy to use & act as lubricants.	Preparation before sexual intercourse could be messy & troublesome. Woman must not get up & move about when spermicide is inserted.
<b>Oral Contraceptive Pill</b>	Synthetic hormone pills.	Prevents ovulation & thickens cervical mucus.	Woman takes one pill a day for 21 consecutive days, starting on first day of menstrual cycle. Stop for seven days & then start all over again.	99% effective if taken as instructed.	Effective, safe & easy to use. Acceptable to most women.	Must take the pill at the same time every day. Possible side-effects.
<b>Contraceptive Injection</b>	A synthetic hormone injection.	Prevents ovulation & thickens cervical mucus.	Injection given every three months.	Almost 100% effective.	Highly effective, long-lasting, safe & easy to use.	Possible side-effects.
<b>Contraceptive Implant</b>	Synthetic hormones in a small plastic rod.	Prevents ovulation & thickens cervical mucus.	Inserted by doctor under skin of woman's upper arm.	Almost 100% effective.	Highly effective, convenient & long-acting.	Possible side-effects.
<b>Intrauterine Device (IUD)</b>	A small device inserted into the womb.	Prevents implantation of fertilised egg.	Inserted by doctor. Woman taught to check for thread every month.	98% effective.	Safe, effective & long-lasting.	Possible side-effects.
<b>Ligation &amp; Vasectomy</b>	Tubes which carry egg (in woman) & sperms (in man) are tied, clipped or tied & cut.	Prevents sperms & egg from meeting.	Simple operation performed by doctor. Does not affect health or sexual relations.	Very effective.	Improved sexual life as fear of unwanted pregnancies is removed. No side-effects.	Permanent method. Only to be used by couples who do not want any more children.



