

Contraception

Contraception refers to any device or technique that is used to prevent pregnancy. There is a range of different methods of contraception available in Australia. Family planning clinics, doctors and pharmacists can advise on the advantages, disadvantages and correct use of each method of contraception.

Choosing a method

For contraception to be successful, each woman and couple needs to choose the method that suits them best. Each method has advantages and disadvantages and both women and men can have different contraceptive needs at different times of their lives. Things to consider when choosing a method of contraception include:

- Cultural and religious beliefs
- Each partner's age and abilities
- The woman's health
- The need for protection from sexually transmissible infections
- Each partner's desire for children in the future
- Whether the woman is breastfeeding

- Frequency of sex
- How effective the method is
- How easy and convenient the method is
- Side effects and risks of the method
- Non-contraceptive benefits of the method
- Cost of the method.

Types of contraception

There are three main methods of contraception – hormonal methods, barrier methods and natural methods.

Hormonal methods

Hormonal methods use oestrogens and progestogens (sex hormones) to change the woman's fertility by:

- Thickening mucus in the cervix so sperm cannot enter the uterus

- Preventing ovulation (stopping release of an egg from the ovary)
- Changing the lining of the uterus (making it unsuitable for pregnancy).

They can be very effective contraceptives when used correctly, but do not protect against sexually transmissible infections. All hormonal methods of contraception are associated with some health risks and side effects and can interact with some medicines. They must be prescribed by a doctor.

- **Oral contraceptive pill (OCP)** – OCPs are hormone tablets that are taken once a day. There is a range of different types of OCPs available in Australia. Some OCPs contain both oestrogen and a progestogen (combined oral contraceptives – ‘the Pill’), while others contain only a progestogen (‘Mini-pills’). A woman may need to try several different OCPs before finding one that suits her.
- **Vaginal Ring** (e.g., *NuvaRing*) – a soft plastic ring which releases oestrogen and progestogen slowly over three weeks. The woman places it inside her vagina herself and leaves it in place for 3 out of the 4 weeks of her menstrual cycle.
- **Progestogen injection** (e.g., *Depo Provera*, *Depot Ralovera*) – a progestogen injection with an effect that lasts three months.
- **Progestogen implant** (e.g., *Implanon*) – a small, thin rod

that a doctor inserts just under the skin of the woman’s upper arm. It releases progestogen slowly over three years.

- **Progestogen intra-uterine device (IUD)** (e.g., *Mirena*) – a small device inserted into the uterus by a doctor. It releases progestogen slowly over five years. (A hormone-free contraceptive IUD is also available.)

Barrier methods

Barrier methods use a physical barrier to block access of sperm to the egg. Condoms, the only method of contraception that can protect against sexually transmissible infections, are available from pharmacies and other shops without a prescription.

- **Male condom** – a thin latex-rubber or plastic sheath which is rolled onto the erect penis before sex.
- **Female condom** – a plastic sheath which is inserted into the vagina by the woman before sex.
- **Diaphragm** – a soft, dome shaped latex rubber cap which is placed over the cervix (inside the vagina) by the woman. It must be inserted before sex and left in place for at least 6 hours after intercourse. A diaphragm must be fitted by a sexual health professional.
- **Sterilisation** – a surgical procedure and usually permanent. Female sterilisation involves stopping passage of the egg by blocking the fallopian tubes (e.g., ‘having tubes tied’).

Male sterilisation involves cutting the tube that carries the sperm from the testes to the semen (vasectomy).

Natural methods

Natural methods do not protect against sexually transmissible infections.

- **Timing methods** – depend on avoiding sexual intercourse during fertile times. Knowledge of the woman's menstrual cycle is used to predict when she is fertile. It is best to be trained properly in these methods by a sexual health professional.
- **Withdrawal** – the man withdraws his penis from the woman's vagina before ejaculation. It is not a reliable method of contraception.

Self care

- Read and follow product instructions for contraceptives.
- Be alert for side effects of hormonal contraception (e.g., headache, nausea, breast tenderness, acne, mood changes, bloating).
- Don't smoke. Smoking increases the health risks of hormonal contraception.
- Use water-based lubricant with rubber condoms to prevent friction and breakage.
- Use a fresh condom for each act of sexual intercourse.

Important

Consult a family planning clinic, doctor or pharmacist if:

- You miss doses of your oral contraceptive pill
- You are experiencing possible side effects from hormonal contraception
- Your period is missed, irregular or unusual
- You have unprotected sex (e.g., a condom breaks) and want emergency contraception.

Emergency contraception – the 'morning after' pill

Emergency contraception can be used by a woman to reduce the likelihood of pregnancy after unprotected intercourse. The most common method of emergency contraception is a special oral dose of progesterone. It is most likely to be effective if taken as soon as possible and preferably no later than 72 hours after unprotected intercourse. The emergency contraceptive pill is available from a pharmacist without a prescription.

For more information

Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia

Listed under 'S' in the white pages of the phone book

Website: www.shfpa.org.au

Your Body Guide

Website: www.understandingyou.com.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

Related fact cards

- » *Genital Herpes*
- » *HIV/AIDS*
- » *Menstrual Chart (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Oral Contraceptives*
- » *Period Problems*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: