

Contraception - implants and injections

Hormonal contraception for women is available in the form of implants or injections that release the contraceptive into the body over a sustained period of time.

Hormonal implants and injections are very effective if used correctly, but can cause side effects. Speak with your doctor or healthcare provider about the form of contraception that best suits your needs.

Other forms of hormonal contraception include oral tablets (the pill and the mini pill), the hormonal IUD and the vaginal ring.

Implanon

Implanon is a hormonal implant the size of a matchstick which is inserted under the skin at the inner side of the upper arm. This 4cm-long implant contains etonogestrel, a progesterone-like hormone that prevents ovulation. This hormone also thickens the mucus in the cervix (entrance to the uterus), preventing sperm from getting through. The device is inserted under local anaesthetic by a doctor.

Advantages of Implanon:

- It's close to 100 per cent effective.
- It lasts for three years.
- It costs around \$34 for Medicare card holders and is cheaper for healthcare card holders.
- At most, it takes just one week to start working (depending on when the implant is inserted).
- It's safe to use when breastfeeding.
- It can be used by most women who can't take synthetic oestrogens.
- Women usually start ovulating again within three weeks of removing the implant.

Disadvantages of Implanon:

- Some bruising and discomfort around the implant is common and might last up to a week.
- It can cause irregularities with periods, such as breakthrough bleeding.
- It can cause headaches, acne, breast tenderness or increased appetite.
- It can move from its original position under the skin.
- There is a slight risk of infection or bleeding around the implant.
- Implanon doesn't protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

DMPA injections (Depo-Provera/Depo-Ralovera)

Depo-Provera and Depo-Ralovera are long-acting, injectable contraceptives that contain only the synthetic form of progesterone, depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA). Each injection of DMPA prevents an unplanned pregnancy for 12 to 14 weeks.

Injectable contraceptives prevent ovulation and thicken the mucus in the cervix, preventing sperm from getting through. They also cause changes to the lining of the uterus, making it difficult for a fertilised egg to stick. Injectable contraceptives can also be used to treat women with menstrual problems.

You will need to talk with your doctor or healthcare provider before you start using DMPA, as this form of contraception isn't suitable for all women.

Advantages of DMPA injections:

- Injectable contraception is very effective and convenient.
- It's safe to use when breastfeeding, especially if the baby is over six weeks old.
- About 50 per cent of women using injectable contraceptives don't have periods, which some women see as an advantage.

Disadvantages of DMPA injections:

- The injection can't be reversed or withdrawn, so side effects might last 12 to 14 weeks.
- It can produce unpredictable irregularities with periods.
- There is a delay in return to fertility after the injection is stopped.
- It can be associated with a reduction in bone density.
- Some women experience side effects such as weight gain, headaches or depression.
- Injectable contraceptives don't protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

Male injectable contraceptives are currently being trialled.

Other types of contraception

There are a number of contraceptive methods available in Australia. Speak with your doctor or healthcare provider about your options. The method you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships. It's important to weigh up the benefits and possible negative effects of each method and think about your current and future needs.

Protect against STIs

It is important to practise safer sex. The best way to reduce the risk of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) is to use barrier protection such as male and female condoms and dams (a thin piece of latex placed over the anal or vulval area during oral sex). Condoms can be used for oral, vaginal and anal sex with other contraceptive methods to help prevent the spread of infections.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100 or 1800 013 952
- Action Centre (for young people aged under 25) Tel. (03) 9654 4766 or 1800 013 952
- The Women's Health Information Centre (WHIC) Tel. (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619
- Community health centre
- Pharmacist.

Things to remember

- Hormonal contraception for women is available in the form of slow-release implants or injections.
- Different methods might suit you at different times in your life.
- Condoms provide the best available protection against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Family Planning Victoria

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