Contraception - implants and injections

Summary

- Hormonal contraception for women is available in the form of slow-release implants or injections.
- This is a type of 'long-acting reversible contraception', or LARC.
- Different methods of contraception may suit you at different times in your life.
- Condoms provide the best available protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

Hormonal contraception for women is available as implants or injections that slowly release hormones into the body over time. Hormonal contraception is a type of 'long-acting reversible contraception', or LARC.

Contraceptive implants and injections are very effective if used the right way. When choosing the method of contraception that best suits you, it can help to talk to a doctor or nurse about your options. Other types of hormonal contraception include oral tablets (the combined pill and the mini pill), the hormonal intrauterine device (IUD) and the vaginal ring.

Contraceptive implant

The contraceptive implant (Implanon NXT™) is a hormonal implant the size of a matchstick. It is inserted under the skin at the inner side of the upper arm. This four-centimetre long implant contains etonogestrel, a progesterone-like hormone that stops ovulation.

This hormone also makes the fluid at the opening to the uterus (womb) thicker, stopping sperm from getting through. The implant is put in and taken out under local anaesthetic by a specially trained doctor or nurse.

Advantages of the contraceptive implant include:

- It is close to 100 per cent effective.
- It lasts for three years.
- It costs about $38 for Medicare card holders (less for healthcare card holders), although there may be some extra costs when the implant is put in.
- If it is inserted during the first five days of a normal period it starts working immediately. At most, it takes one week to start working.
- It is safe to use when breastfeeding.
- About 20 per cent of women who use the contraceptive implant do not have periods, which some women see as an advantage.
- It usually makes periods less painful.
- It can improve acne.
- It can be used by most women who cannot take medication containing oestrogen.
- Women usually start ovulating again within three weeks of having the implant taken out.

Disadvantages of the contraceptive implant include:

- There may be some bruising and tenderness around the implant that can last for up to a week.
- It can make periods irregular, with some women bleeding more often or at unusual times.
- It can cause headaches, acne, breast tenderness and increased appetite.
- Rarely, the implant can move from its original position under the skin. This may affect how easy it is to remove it.
- There is a small risk of infection and bleeding around the implant.
Some medications, such as the ones used to treat epilepsy, and the natural remedy St John’s wort, can stop it from working.

**Contraceptive injection**

The contraceptive injection, known as Depo (Depo-Provera™ or Depo-Ralovera™), is a long-acting method of contraception. It contains only one hormone, depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA), which is a synthetic form of progesterone, a hormone that is made naturally by the body. Each injection of DMPA lasts for 12 to 14 weeks.

The contraceptive injection stops ovulation and makes the fluid at the opening to the uterus thicker, stopping sperm from getting through. It can also be used to treat women with menstrual problems.

If you are thinking about starting the contraceptive injection, talk to a doctor or nurse first because the method does not suit all women.

**Advantages of the contraceptive injection include:**

- It is very effective and convenient.
- It is considered completely safe to use when breastfeeding a baby aged six weeks or older. It is also safe for younger babies, however, it may reduce the amount of breast milk you are producing when breastfeeding.
- About 50 per cent of women who use the contraceptive injection do not have periods, which some women see as an advantage.
- There is no medication that stops it from working.
- No one can know you are using it unless you tell them.

**Disadvantages of the contraceptive injection include:**

- It cannot be reversed or withdrawn, which means its main effect and any side effects can last for 12 to 14 weeks.
- It can make periods irregular, with some women bleeding more often or at unusual times.
- It can take some time for periods and the chance of getting pregnant to go back to normal after stopping the method, sometimes 6 to 12 months.
- It can cause thinning of the bones, where a small amount of bone density is lost, but this should go back to normal after stopping the method.
- Some women put on weight or have headaches or mood changes.

**Other types of contraception**

There are many contraceptive methods available in Australia. The method you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships.

Talk about your options with a doctor or reproductive health nurse to help you consider how well each method works, the possible side effects, how easy it is to use, how much it costs and how each method meets your current and future needs.

**Protection from sexually transmissible infections**

Contraceptive implants and injections do not give protection from **sexually transmissible infections (STIs).**

To prevent yourself from getting an STI, or passing one on to someone else, it is important to practise **safer sex.**

The best way to lessen the risk of STIs is to use barrier methods, such as condoms for oral, vaginal and anal sex with all new sexual partners. Condoms can be used with IUDs.

**Where to get help**

- **1800 my options** can provide information on the phone about a range of private and public clinics and services Tel. 1800 696 784

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betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Your GP
- Pharmacist
- Many community health services and some public hospitals will have a family planning clinic, a sexual health clinic or women’s health clinic providing contraception
- **Family Planning Victoria** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100
- **Family Planning Victoria Action Centre** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages, with an afternoon drop-in clinic for people under 25 years of age Tel. (03) 9660 4700 or 1800 013 952

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