You can discuss your contraception options with a GP or reproductive health nurse. Different methods may suit you at different times in your life.

Methods of contraception that are available include: barrier methods, pills and vaginal rings, intrauterine devices (IUDs), implants and injections, sterilisation, emergency contraception and natural methods.

Condoms provide the best available protection against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

There are many contraceptive methods available in Australia, including implants and injections, intrauterine devices (IUDs, both copper and hormonal), emergency contraception, pills and vaginal rings, barrier methods (male and female condoms and diaphragms), female and male sterilisation and natural methods (natural family planning).

Choosing the right contraception for you

When you are choosing the method of contraception that is right for you, it is important to have accurate information and to talk openly about your options with your partner. It is also important to think about how well each method works, the possible side effects, how easy it is to use and how much it costs.

The method you choose will depend on a range of factors, such as your general health, lifestyle and relationships, your risk of getting a sexually transmissible infection (STI) and how important it is for you not to get pregnant.

Some methods require more effort than others. You will need to think about which option best suits you. For example, if you choose oral contraception, you will need to remember to take a pill every day, whereas if you choose the contraceptive implant, it can last for up to three years. It is important to weigh the pros and cons and think about how each method meets your current and future needs. It can help to talk about your options with a GP or reproductive health nurse.

Contraceptive protection from STIs

As well as preventing an unintended pregnancy, it is also important to practise safer sex. Not all methods of contraception give protection from STIs. The best way to lessen the risk of STIs is to use condoms. Condoms can be used for oral, vaginal and anal sex to help stop infections from spreading.

Long acting reversible contraception

Long acting reversible contraception (LARC), gives safe, effective contraception over a number of years (how long varies, depending on the type). LARC includes the contraceptive implant, injections and the copper and hormonal IUDs. IUDs are the most effective reversible methods available and require replacement less often than any other method.

Contraceptive implants

A contraceptive implant is a LARC method, available in Australia as Implanon NXT™. It is a small plastic rod that is placed under the skin of your upper arm. It slowly releases a low dose of the hormone progestogen, which stops your ovaries releasing an egg each month. You will notice a change to your period or it may stop altogether. The implant will last for three years. It can easily be removed and won’t stop you from getting pregnant later on. It is safe to use if you are breastfeeding.

Contraceptive injections (Depo)

The contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera™ or Depo-Ralovera™, also known as Depo) is a hormonal injection. It contains a progesterone-like hormone that is given every 12 to 14 weeks. This method stops ovulation and makes the fluid at the opening to the uterus thicker, stopping sperm from getting through. You will notice a change to your period or it may stop altogether.

The contraceptive injection is a very effective and private method of contraception. It can be used while breastfeeding and is not affected by other medications.

Contraceptive intrauterine devices (IUDs)

An IUD is a small contraceptive device that is placed in your uterus. An IUD is also a LARC method. There are two kinds of IUD:

- copper IUD (Cu-IUD) – lasts for 5 to 10 years
- hormone-releasing IUD – lasts for 5 years.

An IUD stops sperm from reaching and fertilising an egg. It also changes the lining of your uterus, so a fertilised egg won’t embed in it.

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An IUD can easily be removed by a doctor or nurse and won’t stop you from getting pregnant later on.

The copper IUD may make your periods heavier and the hormonal IUD will make your periods lighter or stop them completely.

Both IUD types are safe in breastfeeding and are not affected by other medications.

**Combined contraceptive pills and vaginal rings**

Combined hormonal contraception contains synthetic forms of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone. They stop ovulation and make the fluid at the opening to the uterus thicker, stopping sperm from getting through. They are available with a prescription as a pill (oral contraception) or a vaginal ring (NuvaRing™).

These methods are very effective (99.7 per cent) if used the right way, but allowing for missed pills or forgetting to put a new ring in on time, may only be 93 per cent effective.

Both the combined pill and vaginal ring can be used to skip periods.

These method are generally not recommended for those who are at risk of heart disease, such as people who smoke who are over 35 years of age.

**Combined pill**

The combined pill is taken as a daily tablet. There are many types of combined pills with different doses and hormones.

**Vaginal ring**

The vaginal ring has similar hormones to the combined pill. A ‘one size fits all’ ring is put into the vagina and stays in place for three weeks. It slowly releases hormones that move from the vagina into the bloodstream. After this three-week period, the ring is taken out and a new ring is put in one week later. It is as easy to put in as a tampon and saves having to remember to take a pill every day.

**Mini pill**

The mini pill contains a synthetic form of only one hormone, progesterone. It makes the fluid at the opening to the uterus thicker, stopping sperm from getting through.

The mini pill may not be as effective as the combined pill, particularly in younger users. It needs to be taken every day at the same time. It usually suits those who either have side effects when they take oestrogen or cannot take oestrogen for health reasons. The mini pill can be used while breastfeeding.

**Barrier methods of contraception**

Barrier methods of contraception stop sperm from getting into the uterus. Options include:

- male condom
- female condom
- diaphragm.

Male and female condoms also lessen the risk of STIs. Barrier methods can be very effective if used the right way every time you have sex.

**Male condom**

The male condom is a latex (or polyurethane) covering that is put over the erect penis, stopping sperm from getting into the vagina. The method is 98 per cent effective if used the right way. This means using a condom every time you have sex and putting it on before there is any contact between the penis and vagina.

Male condoms are not as expensive as other methods and are available from pharmacies without a doctor’s prescription, as well as from supermarkets, sexual health clinics and from vending machines in some areas.

**Female condom**

The female condom is a loose polyurethane pouch with a flexible ring at each end that sits in the vagina, stopping sperm from getting into the uterus. It can be put in several hours before having sex and is stronger than the male latex condom. Using this method may take some practice. If the female condom is used the right way every time you have sex, it is 95 per cent effective.

Female condoms are available from Family Planning Victoria (by mail order) and some retail outlets and sexual health clinics.

**Diaphragm**

The single size diaphragm is available in Australia as Caya™. It is a soft, shallow, silicone dome that fits in the vagina. It covers the opening to the uterus, stopping sperm from getting through. The diaphragm needs to stay in place for at least six hours after having sex.

The diaphragm can be bought online from some family planning clinics and pharmacies. The single size diaphragm will not fit about 15 per cent of users. It is recommended that you see a doctor or nurse to check that the diaphragm is a good fit for you. If used the right way, this method is 86 per cent effective.

**Permanent methods of contraception**

Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that involves having a surgical procedure. It is a very effective method of contraception.

**Female sterilisation – tubal ligation**

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Tubal ligation, known as ‘having your tubes tied’, involves minor surgery where a clip is put on each fallopian tube under general anaesthetic.

Male sterilisation – vasectomy

Vasectomy involves cutting the tubes that carry sperm to stop sperm from moving from the testes to the penis. It can be performed under local or general anaesthetic.

Natural methods of contraception

Natural methods or fertility awareness methods of contraception include rhythm, symptothermal, cervical mucus observation and basal temperature methods. They are based on you monitoring your bodily signs daily (or more than once a day, depending on the method), such as changes to your body’s temperature and to your vaginal fluid. This is to determine when you are potentially fertile during your menstrual cycle.

Practising natural methods of contraception requires you to abstain from (not have) sex or to use contraception when you can get pregnant. Depending on your menstrual cycle, you may need to abstain from sex for up to 16 days.

Fertility awareness methods are not recommended in some circumstances – for example if you:

- have a fever, vaginal infection or polycystic ovary syndrome
- regularly travel through different time zones
- are under stress.

The effectiveness of natural family planning varies, depending on which method or combination of methods is used.

Emergency contraception

There are various types of emergency contraception that you can use after unprotected sex.

Copper IUD

The copper IUD is the most effective method of emergency contraception. It can be inserted within five days of unprotected intercourse or, if the date of ovulation can be estimated, up to five days after ovulation, in women for whom they are suitable.

Another advantage of copper IUDs is that they can provide effective contraception for at least five and up to 10 years.

Emergency contraceptive pill

Sometimes called the ‘morning after pill’, the emergency contraceptive pill should be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex for maximum effectiveness. It is not 100 per cent effective in preventing pregnancy.

There are two types of emergency contraceptive pill, both available at pharmacies without a prescription:

- ulipristal (UPA-EC) is intended to be taken up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected sex
- levonorgestrel (LNG-EC) is intended to be taken up to three days (72 hours) after unprotected sex.

Ulipristal has been clinically demonstrated to be more effective than levonorgestrel in reducing the risk of pregnancy when taken up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected sex.

No prescription is required for either of these emergency contraceptive pills.

It is not recommended that you use emergency contraceptive pills as your usual method of contraception. Using a reliable form of contraception is the best protection against unintended pregnancy. Ask your GP or reproductive health nurse for advice.

Where to get help

- [1800 my options](https://www.healthservicefinders.com.au) can provide information on the phone about a range of private and public clinics and services Tel. 1800 606 784
- Your GP
- Reproductive health nurse
- Pharmacist
- Community health services and some hospitals have sexual health, women’s health, sexual and reproductive health or family planning clinics which offer contraceptive services
- 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
- Private clinics offering abortion also offer contraceptive services

References


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Sexual health

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Sexual health basics
- Sexual relationships
- Sexuality and sexual identity
- Sex education
- Sexual assault and abuse
- Contraception and abortion
- Sexual issues throughout life
- Health conditions and sexual issues

Sexual health basics

- Contraception - condoms for men
  Condoms are the most effective way to reduce your risk of contracting a sexually transmissible infection (STI) during sex.

- Contraception - condoms for women
  The female condom is effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy and protecting against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

- Contraception - choices
  The method of contraception you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships.

- Contraception - emergency contraception
  It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours (four days).

- Masturbation
  Masturbation is a normal and healthy way for people to explore their own bodies.

- Oral sex
  Oral sex is using your mouth, lips or tongue to stimulate your partner’s genitals or anus. Both men and women can give and receive oral sex.

- Safe sex
  Safe sex is sexual contact that doesn't involve the exchange of semen, vaginal fluids or blood between partners.

- Sex – are you ready
  It is normal to have mixed feelings about having sex with someone else.

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
  It is not difficult to avoid catching sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

- Women's sexual and reproductive health (video)
  Find out some facts about women's sexual and reproductive health, including fertility, contraception, menopause, parental consent and conditions (such as PCOS and endometriosis).

Sexual relationships

- Partying safely and sex
  Partying is fun but being out of it on alcohol or drugs can put you at risk of unwanted or unsafe sex.

- Safe sex
  Safe sex is sexual contact that doesn't involve the exchange of semen, vaginal fluids or blood between partners.

- Sex – are you ready
  It is normal to have mixed feelings about having sex with someone else.

- Time to immunise - free vaccines for men who have sex with men
  Immunisation is one of the best ways you can protect yourself and others from infectious diseases in our community. In partnership with Thorne Harbour Health (formerly Victorian AIDS Council), the...

- Women's sexual and reproductive health (video)
  Find out some facts about women's sexual and reproductive health, including fertility, contraception, menopause, parental consent and conditions (such as...
Sexuality and sexual identity

- **Bisexuality**
  Bisexuality is when a person finds men and women physically, sexually or emotionally attractive.

- **Family violence and the LGBTIQ communities**
  Within Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence. Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as...

- **Gay male sexuality**
  There is no real explanation as to why some men are gay and others are not; it is just part of the wide variety of human sexuality...

- **Lesbian sexuality**
  Many women report they have lesbian experiences or feelings, but do not think of themselves as lesbians...

- **Men and sexuality**
  Sexuality is not about whom we have sex with, or how often we have it. Sexuality is about our sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people. We can find other people...

- **Mental health and wellbeing support for LGBTI people**
  If you or someone you know requires support from an LGBTI or mental health organisation there are services available...

- **Sexuality explained**
  Sexuality is not about whom we have sex with, or how often we have it. Sexuality is about our sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people. We can find other people...

- **Switchboard (Victoria)**
  The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard (Victoria) is a telephone helpline that gives advice, information, counselling and referrals to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) people in...

- **Trans and gender diverse people**
  Your gender is what feels natural to you, even if it is different from your biological sex. Some people may not feel comfortable with their biological sex but choose to live with the gender with which...

- **Women and sexuality**
  Most girls start puberty around 10 years old, but it can be earlier or later than that. Your body will go through big changes as you change from a girl into a young woman. For some girls (and women...
Sexual assault and abuse

- Date rape
  Date rape can be especially common among young people who have had little sexual experience and aren’t sure that what they have experienced crosses the line into rape. Many victims of date rape can...
- People with a disability who experience violence, abuse or neglect
  People with a disability who experience violence, abuse or neglect can seek help from a range of services specifically designed to help them...
- Recognising when a child is at risk
  Too many children are physically, sexually and emotionally abused and when this happens, it is up to adults to speak up...
- Sexual abuse
  If you suspect sexual abuse or have been told about it by a child, you must report it...
- Sexual abuse - helping your child
  As a parent, you have an important role in helping your child recover from sexual abuse...
- Sexual assault
  Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes the victim feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened...

Contraception and abortion

- Abortion
  All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions...
- Abortion procedures - medication
  Mifepristone, also called RU486 or the 'abortion pill', is used to terminate (end) a pregnancy up to nine weeks...
- Abortion procedures - surgical
  Abortion is one of the most common and safest types of surgery in Australia...
- Contraception after an abortion
  Whether you have a surgical or medical abortion you can become fertile again very soon after the abortion, so it's important to start using contraception immediately if you wish to prevent any...
- Contraception after giving birth
  After having a baby, you need to choose an effective method of contraception if you don't want to have another baby straight away...
- Contraception - choices
  The method of contraception you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships...
- Contraception - condoms for men
  Condoms are the most effective way to reduce your risk of contracting a sexually transmissible infection (STI) during sex...
- Contraception - condoms for women
  The female condom is effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy and protecting against sexually transmissible infections (STIs)...
- Contraception - diaphragms
  The diaphragm acts as a barrier method of contraception...
- Contraception - emergency contraception
  It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours (four days)...
- Contraception - implants and injections
  Hormonal contraception for women is available as implants or injections that slowly release hormones into the body over time...
- Contraception - injections for men
  Contraceptive injections for men are not yet available in Australia, but clinical studies suggest that they may provide a safe, effective and reversible method of male contraception in the future...
- Contraception - intrauterine devices (IUD)
An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small contraceptive device that is put into the uterus (womb) to prevent pregnancy.

- **Contraception - Louna's lowdown on emergency contraception (video)**
  This video was made by the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia, with Louna Maroun to inform teenagers about this safe, effective form of contraception to prevent an unplanned pregnancy.

- **Contraception - the combined pill**
  The two types of oral contraception available in Australia are the combined pill, known as the Pill, and the mini pill.

- **Contraception - the mini pill**
  The two types of oral contraception available in Australia are the combined pill, known as "the Pill", and the mini pill.

- **Contraception - tubal ligation**
  Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that a woman can choose if she is sure that she does not want children in the future.

- **Contraception - vaginal ring**
  The vaginal ring works in a similar way to the oral contraceptive pill to prevent pregnancy.

- **Contraception - vasectomy**
  Having a vasectomy does not affect a man’s ability to produce male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.

- **Pregnancy - unplanned**
  When a woman does not want to become a parent, her pregnancy options may include abortion or adoption.

**Sexual issues throughout life**

- **Disability and sexuality**
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support.

- **Intellectual disability and sexuality**
  People with intellectual disability can express their sexuality in satisfying ways.

- **Menopause and sexual issues**
  Menopause, the final menstrual period, is a natural event that marks the end of a woman's reproductive years.

- **Puberty**
  Adjusting to the many changes that happen around puberty can be difficult for both parents and young people.

- **Sex and chronic illness**
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support.

**Health conditions and sexual issues**

- **Brain injury and sexual issues**
  A brain injury can change the way a person experiences and expresses their sexuality.

- **Diabetes and erectile dysfunction**
  Men with diabetes are more prone to problems with erectile dysfunction or impotence.

- **Disability and sexuality**
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support.

- **HIV and men - safer sex**
  HIV transmission can occur from men to women and from women to men as well as between men who have sex with men.

- **HIV and women – having children**
  Women living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), or women whose partner is HIV-positive, may wish to have children but feel concerned about the risk of transmission of the virus to themselves if...
Practising safe sex is important, whether your partner is HIV-positive or not...

- Intellectual disability and sexuality
  People with intellectual disability can express their sexuality in satisfying ways...

- Parkinson's disease and sexual issues
  Communication is the best remedy for all types of relationship problems, including sexual problems caused by Parkinson's disease...

- Sex and chronic illness
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support...

- Time to immunise - free vaccines for men who have sex with men
  Immunisation is one of the best ways you can protect yourself and others from infectious diseases in our community. In partnership with Thorne Harbour Health (formerly Victorian AIDS Council), the...

Related Information

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  Condoms are the most effective way to reduce your risk of contracting a sexually transmissible infection (STI) during sex...

- Contraception - injections for men
  Contraceptive injections for men are not yet available in Australia, but clinical studies suggest that they may provide a safe, effective and reversible method of male contraception in the future...

- Contraception - emergency contraception
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- Abortion
  All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions...

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Related information on other websites

- Family Planning NSW
- Family Planning Victoria
- Reach Out
- The law, young people and contraception - Legal aid Victoria updated April 2014
- Contraception - The royal women's hospital
- Contraception - Jean Hailes
- Yarning about contraception - Jean Hailes

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Multilingual resources on contraception general

- Contraception - your choices - Arabic
- Contraception - your choices - Chinese
- Contraception overview - Chinese
- Contraception overview - Dari
- Contraception overview - Dinka
- Contraception overview - Swahili
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Arabic
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Assyrian
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Burmese
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Chinese
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Dinka
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Khmer
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Swahili
- Family Planning NSW - contraception general - Thai

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