Contraception - intrauterine devices (IUD)
Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are small contraceptive devices that are inserted into the uterus (womb) to prevent pregnancy. The two types available are the copper IUD and the hormonal IUD (sold as Mirena™). Both are among the most effective methods of contraception and can stay in place for five to ten years, depending on the type. IUDs, both copper and hormonal, do not provide protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The best way to reduce the risk of STIs is to use barrier protection such as condoms with all new sexual partners.

What is an IUD?

An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small contraceptive device that is put into the uterus (womb) to prevent pregnancy. The two types available in Australia are the copper IUD and the hormonal IUD (Mirena™). The copper IUD is designed to stay in place for up to 10 years and the hormonal IUD (Mirena) for five years. Both can easily be removed sooner, if needed.

Copper IUD

The copper IUD is a small, T-shaped, plastic and copper device. It constantly releases a small amount of copper into the uterus. The copper IUD can also be used for emergency contraception instead of the emergency contraceptive pill ('morning after pill').

Hormonal IUD

The hormonal IUD is a small, T-shaped, plastic device, sold as Mirena™ in Australia. It slowly releases a hormone (progestogen) into your uterus. Progestogen is similar to the hormone produced by the ovaries.

How effective are IUDs?

Both copper and hormonal IUDs are more than 99 per cent effective at preventing pregnancy.

How do I use an IUD?

Your doctor or nurse will write you a script and you can get the IUD from your pharmacy. Sometimes you can buy a copper IUD from the clinic providing the IUD insertion.

The IUD is inserted inside your uterus by a trained doctor or nurse. It has a fine nylon thread attached to it which comes out through the cervix (opening to the uterus). If you feel high up inside your vagina, you can check that the thread is there and know the IUD is still in place. Because it is high up in the vagina the thread cannot be seen.

It is good to make a record of the date when you had the IUD inserted. You will need to make sure it is taken out before it expires (five or ten years (depending on the type) after being inserted).

Your partner might be able to feel the IUD string during sex, but it rarely hurts them.

How much does an IUD cost?

The hormonal IUD prescription is covered by a Health Care Card in Australia. It costs around $6.40 if you are a Health Care Card holder and around $39.50 if you are not.

The copper IUD is not covered by a Health Care Card and may cost around $70–120 outside a public hospital setting.

The overall cost of the procedure will vary depending on whether you attend a private or public provider. If you don't have a Medicare card it, will be more expensive.

Advantages of IUDs

Advantages of copper or hormonal IUDs include:

- They are more than 99 per cent effective in preventing pregnancy.
They last for a long time – Mirena can last for five years, and the copper IUD can last for ten years.

They are safe to use if you are breastfeeding.

No medications stop them from working.

They provide another contraceptive choice if you have difficulty taking the hormone oestrogen. (The combined pill and the vaginal ring contain both oestrogen and progestogen.) The hormonal IUD only contains progestogen and the copper IUD has no hormones.

Once they have been put in, you don’t need to do anything more apart from checking the thread each month after your period to ensure it has not moved out of the correct position.

The device can be taken out at any time by an appropriately trained doctor or nurse.

Your chance of getting pregnant will go back to normal as soon as the copper or hormonal IUD has been taken out.

Advantages of hormonal IUDs include:

- Most users have no vaginal bleeding at all, or a light regular period.
- Periods may be less painful.

Advantages of copper IUDs include:

- They are a choice for those who do not want to use hormonal contraception.
- They are a very effective method of emergency contraception.

Are there any side effects from using the hormonal IUD?

Possible side effects when using the hormonal IUD include:

- When it is first inserted some users have period-type cramping that usually settles after a few days.
- Sometimes the IUD can come out. This is more common in the first three months of it being inserted.
- Your period will change. Spotting or frequent bleeding is common in the first three to six months. By six months around 95 per cent of users will have a light regular period or no bleeding at all (this is not harmful to the body).
- You may experience tender breasts, headaches, skin changes and mood changes. These side effects nearly always settle with time. The hormonal IUD has not been shown to cause weight gain.

Are there any side effects from using the copper IUD?

Possible side effects when using the copper IUD include:

- Spotting or frequent bleeding is common in the first three months. This nearly always settles with time and your regular bleeding pattern will return.
- For some users periods will be heavier.

Can the hormonal IUD cause any serious health problems?

In about 1 in 500 users, a small hole in the wall of the uterus (womb) may be created while the IUD is being inserted. The IUD can move through the hole and sit in the wrong place. If this happens, keyhole surgery is required to have the IUD removed.

Around 1 in 300 users get an infection when the IUD is first inserted. This is usually successfully treated with antibiotics.

It is very unlikely to get pregnant when using an IUD. If you do get pregnant with an IUD in place, there is a higher chance of ectopic pregnancy. This means that the pregnancy may settle in the fallopian tubes (pathway of the egg to uterus).

When is an IUD not a good option?

An IUD might not be a good option for you if you have:

- a uterus that is not the usual shape
- a current pelvic infection.

The hormonal IUD might not be a good option for you if you have:

- been treated for breast cancer
- severe liver disease.

The copper IUD might not be a good option for you if you have:

- heavy periods
- low iron levels
- endometriosis.

What happens if I get pregnant while I’m using an IUD?

If you become pregnant while you are using an IUD it is important that you see a doctor or nurse as soon as possible and have the IUD removed. The doctor or nurse will also need to rule out a pregnancy in your fallopian tubes (ectopic pregnancy).

If the IUD is removed, there will be no harm to the pregnancy and you can choose to continue or terminate the pregnancy (have an abortion). If the IUD is not removed and you continue with the pregnancy, there is a high risk of losing the pregnancy.

Can I use an IUD after I’ve had a baby?

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You can have an IUD inserted straight after you give birth. If it is not inserted straight after you give birth, then you need to wait at least four weeks. IUDs are safe to use if you are breastfeeding.

**What if I’m using an IUD and I want to become pregnant?**

An IUD can be removed at any time by a doctor or a nurse. Your fertility will quickly return.

**Other types of contraception**

There are many contraceptive methods available in Australia. When choosing the method of contraception that best suits you, it can help to talk to a doctor or nurse about your options. Different methods may suit you at different times in your life.

A doctor or nurse can give you information about:

- the benefits and risks of using various methods of contraception
- how well each method works
- the possible side effects
- how easy it is to use
- how much it costs
- how each method meets your current and future needs.

Other methods include the contraceptive implant or injection, the vaginal ring or the combined oral contraceptive pill.

**IUDs do not give protection from STIs**

Neither type of IUD gives protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). It is important to practise safer sex, as well as to prevent an unintended pregnancy.

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**

- 1800myoptions can provide information on a range of private and public clinics and services which can offer IUD insertion
- Your GP
- Pharmacist
- Many community health services and public hospitals will have a family planning clinic, a sexual health clinic or women’s health clinic
- 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

**References**

- Contraception, Family Planning Victoria, Australia.
- Hormone-releasing IUD (Mirena), Family Planning NSW.
- LARC, Family Planning Alliance Australia.
- Copper IUD, Family Planning NSW.

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More information

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).

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• 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).

• 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 PCOS and endometriosis).

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 well-being support for LGBTI people
  If you or someone you know requires support from an LGBTI or mental health organisation there are services available.

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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...}

Sex education

- Sex education - tips for parents
  Mothers are more likely to talk about intimate, emotional and psychological aspects of sex than fathers...

- Talking to children with cognitive disability about sex
  All people, including those with cognitive disabilities, have the right to explore and express their sexuality in appropriate ways...

- Talking to pre-schoolers about sex
  By four, most children are curious about certain sexual issues, and they need honest answers to their questions...

- Talking to primary school children about sex
  Some parents find it hard to talk with their primary age children about sex, but help is available...

- Talking to young people about sex
  Talking about sex with your child is easier if you start when your child is young...

- Talking to young people with cognitive disabilities about sex
  Young people with cognitive disabilities have the same range of sexual feelings and desires as young people without disabilities...

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

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 other pregnancies.

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 - diaphragm

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.

Contraception - un planned

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

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Sexual issues throughout life

- Cognitive 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...

- Physical 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...

- 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...

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

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

- 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...

- HIV and women – safer sex
  Practising safe sex is important, whether your partner is HIV-positive or not...

- 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...

- Physical 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...

- 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

- 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 - diaphragms
  The diaphragm acts as a barrier method of contraception...
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 - implants and injections

Hormonal contraception for women is available as implants or injections that slowly release hormones into the body over time...

Contraception - condoms for women

The female condom is effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy and protecting against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).
Long acting reversible contraception - LARC - Arabic
Longer-lasting contraception - Arabic
Long acting reversible contraception - LARC - Chinese
Longer-lasting contraception - Chinese
The copper IUD - Arabic
The copper IUD - Assyrian
The copper IUD - Burmese
The copper IUD - Chinese
The copper IUD - Dinka
The copper IUD - Khmer
The copper IUD - Swahili
The copper IUD - Thai
The hormone releasing IUD - Mirena - Arabic
The hormone releasing IUD - Mirena - Assyrian
The hormone releasing IUD - Mirena - Burmese
The hormone releasing IUD - Mirena - Chinese
The hormone releasing IUD - Mirena - Dinka
The hormone releasing IUD - Mirena - Khmer
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