

## Birth Control Methods

Birth control, or contraception, is any method or device used to prevent pregnancy. Women can choose from many different types of birth control. Some work better than others at preventing pregnancy. The type of birth control you use depends on your health, your desire to have children now or in the future, and your need to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs, also called STDs). Your doctor can help you decide which type is best for you right now.

### Q: What are the different types of birth control?

**A:** Women can choose from many different types of birth control methods. These include (in order of most effective to least effective at preventing pregnancy):

- **Female and male sterilization** (female tubal ligation or occlusion, male vasectomy) — Birth control that prevents pregnancy for the rest of your life through surgery or a medical procedure.
- **Long-acting reversible contraceptives or “LARC” methods** (intrauterine devices, hormonal implants) — Birth control that your doctor inserts one time and you do not have to remember to take every day or month. LARCs last for 3 to 10 years, depending on the method.
- **Short-acting hormonal methods** (pill, mini pills, patch, shot, vaginal ring) — Birth control that your doctor prescribes that you remember to take every day or month. For the shot, you need to see your doctor every three months.
- **Barrier methods** (condoms, diaphragms, sponge, cervical cap) — Birth control that you use each time you have sex.
- **Natural rhythm methods** — Not using a type of birth control but instead avoiding sex and/or using birth control only on the days when you are most fertile (most likely to get pregnant). An ovulation home test kit or a fertility monitor can help you find your most fertile days.

### Q: Which types of birth control help prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

**A:** Only two types of birth control can protect you from STIs, including HIV: male condoms and female condoms. While condoms are the best way to prevent STIs if you have sex, they are not the most effective type of birth control. If you have sex, the best way to prevent both STIs and pregnancy is to use what is called “dual protection.” Dual protection means you use a condom to prevent STIs each time you have sex, and at the same time, you use a more effective form of birth control, such as an IUD, implant, or shot.

### Q: Which types of birth control can I get without a prescription?

**A:** You can buy these types of birth control over the counter at a drugstore or supermarket:

- Male condoms
- Female condoms
- Sponges
- Spermicides

### Q: Which types of birth control do I have to see my doctor to get?

**A:** You need a prescription for these types of birth control:

- Oral contraceptives: the pill and the mini-pill (in some states, birth control pills are now available without a prescription, through the pharmacy)
- Patch
- Vaginal ring
- Diaphragms (your doctor or nurse needs to fit one to the shape of your vagina)
- Shot/injection (you get the shot at your doctor’s office or family planning clinic)

- Cervical cap
- Implantable rod (inserted by a doctor in the office or clinic)
- IUD (inserted by a doctor in the office or clinic)

You will need surgery or a medical procedure for:

- Female sterilization (tubal ligation)
- Male sterilization (vasectomy)
- Tubal implant (Essure®)

### Q: How can I get free or low-cost birth control?

**A:** Under the Affordable Care Act (the health care law), most insurance plans cover FDA-approved prescription birth control, such as the pill, IUDs, and female sterilization,

at no additional cost to you. This also includes birth control counseling.

- If you have insurance, check with your insurance provider to find out what's included in your plan.
- If you have Medicaid, your insurance covers birth control. This includes birth control and visits to your doctor related to birth control. Programs vary between states, so check with your state's Medicaid program to learn what your benefits are.
- If you don't have insurance, don't panic. Family planning (reproductive health) clinics may provide some birth control methods for free or at low cost. Call your local clinic to learn more.

For information about other services covered by the Affordable Care Act, visit [www.HealthCare.gov](http://www.HealthCare.gov).

## For more information...

For more information on birth control methods, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

- **Food and Drug Administration**  
Phone Number: 888-463-6332  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)
- **Office of Population Affairs**  
Phone Number: 240-453-2888  
[www.hhs.gov/opa](http://www.hhs.gov/opa)
- **American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**  
Phone Number: 800-762-2264 x 349 (for publications requests only) • [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)
- **Planned Parenthood Federation of America**  
Phone Number: 800-230-7526  
[www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

The Office on Women's Health is grateful for the additional reviews by:

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