

Remember

- Condoms are the only method of birth control that also protects against transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Use condoms in addition to your birth control method to reduce your risk of getting or passing on an STI.
- If you forget to use your method or use it incorrectly, you can take emergency contraception (progestin emergency contraceptive pills/Plan B, Ella, or a copper IUD) to prevent pregnancy. See our *Emergency Contraception* factsheet for more information.
- For more detailed information about a particular method, see the individual factsheet for that method .

For youth ages 13-29

Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments
Call 416-961-0113 or visit www.ppt.on.ca

For youth ages 13-19

Teen Health Source

Offers anonymous and confidential sexual health information for teens by teens.
Text (647) 933-5399, call (416) 961-3200, email teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca
Chat online and visit www.teenhealthsource.com

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birth control options series

birth control options

This factsheet gives a brief overview of all of the birth control (contraception) methods that are available in Canada. Everyone is different and you need to find the method that is right for you.

What is birth control (contraception)?

- In order to get pregnant, sperm must enter the vagina*, swim up into the uterus and fertilize an egg that has been released from your ovaries during ovulation.
- Birth control methods prevent or interfere with this process in a variety of different ways, depending on the method.

Things to consider when choosing a birth control method

- Effectiveness
- Potential side effects
- How often you need to use the method
- Whether or not you need to do something every time you have vaginal sex
- How much the method costs
- The level of cooperation it requires of your sexual partner(s)
- How permanent the method is or how long you can use it
- Your values (cultural, religious, etc.)
- Whether or not you have any medical conditions, take medications or smoke (these may rule out certain options for you)
- How comfortable you are touching your genitals
- The impact of the method on the environment
- When or if you want to have (more) children

* We know that these aren't the words everyone uses for their bodies (eg. trans folks), and support you using the language that feels best for you.

| method | what it is | how you use it | effective-ness | possible side effects |
|------------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|---|
| pill | pill with 2 hormones (estrogen and progestin) | take orally at same time every day | 99% (92-97% with typical use) | nausea, breast/chest tenderness, moodiness, spotting; small increased blood clot risk |
| patch | patch with 2 hormones (estrogen and progestin) | wear on skin and change once a week | 99% (92-97% with typical use) | nausea, breast/chest tenderness, moodiness, skin irritation, spotting; small increased blood clot risk |
| ring | ring with 2 hormones (estrogen and progestin) | insert in vagina and change monthly | 99% (92-97% with typical use) | nausea, breast/chest tenderness, moodiness, vaginal irritation, spotting; small increased blood clot risk |
| injection | shot with 1 hormone (progestin) | get a shot at a clinic every 12-13 weeks | 99% (97% with typical use) | spotting, irregular, and/or reduced periods, bone density loss, weight gain, mood changes/low mood, delayed return of fertility |
| hormonal IUD | intra-uterine device with 1 hormone (progestin) | clinician inserts into uterus, leave in up to 5 years | 99.9% | spotting, irregular, and/or reduced periods, acne, mood changes/low mood |
| implant | plastic rod with 1 hormone (progestin) | clinician inserts under skin of upper arm, leave in up to 3 years | 99.7% | spotting, irregular, and/or reduced periods, increased periods, acne, mood changes/low mood |
| copper IUD | intra-uterine device with no hormones | clinician inserts into uterus, leave in up to 3, 5, or 10 years | 99% | heavier periods with increased cramping |
| external condom | thin latex or non-latex covering | put over erect penis before having sex | 97% (86% with typical use) | none |
| internal condom | non-latex pouch | insert into vagina before having sex | 95% (80% with typical use) | none |
| sperm-icidal methods | spermicide in thin square film, foam, or gel | insert into vagina, may need to wait 15 min before having sex | 94% (72% with typical use) | vaginal/penile irritation, risk of vaginal and urinary tract infections |
| diaphragm | reusable dome you fill with spermicide | insert into vagina before having sex | 92-96% (75-80% with typical use) | vaginal/penile irritation, risk of vaginal and urinary tract infections |
| fertility awareness methods | tracking your fertility cycle and fertility signs | record body temp., cervical mucus & position | 95-98% (76% with typical use) | none |
| withdrawal | pulling out | pull penis out of vagina before ejaculation | 96% (81% with typical use) | none |

avoid vaginal sex or use another method during fertile times; it can take time to learn how to use FAMs properly; FAM consultants can be hard to find and/or expensive.

- **Cost:** FAM consultant fees vary. Otherwise free.

Withdrawal

- **What:** pulling the penis out of the vagina before ejaculation (cumming) and ejaculating away from the vulva/vagina.
- **How:** withdrawal prevents sperm from entering the vagina and fertilizing an egg.
- **Effectiveness:** withdrawal is 96% effective at preventing pregnancy. Because it may be used incorrectly, it is 81% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** none.
- **Advantages:** you don't need a prescription; you only need to do it when you have sex; there are no side effects; it's free.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to do it every time you have sex; your partner may not be able to/know when to pull out in time; you don't have control over using it.
- **Cost:** free.

Getting Your Partner's Support

There are many things your partner(s) can do to support you in using a birth control method correctly and consistently including:

- Coming to appointments to discuss birth control options.
- Helping pay for birth control.
- Having emergency contraception (Plan B) and condoms on hand/at their place for back-up.
- Offering to send gentle reminders to use the method, like a text reminder to take the pill, or help keep track of when to book your appointment at the clinic to get the injection, etc.
- Being understanding if you experience side effects that may temporarily interfere with your sexual activity together.
- When a method hasn't been used correctly (e.g. you've missed a pill, you forgot to put your ring in on time, etc.), using condoms or other back-up until the original method is effective again.

Diaphragm with Spermicidal or Barrier Gel/Caya

- **What:** a reusable silicone dome that you fill with spermicidal or barrier gel and put inside your vagina. It can last for up to 2 years.
- **How:** the diaphragm filled with gel covers the cervix, making it difficult for sperm to get through it. The spermicidal gel inside it kills sperm, or the barrier gel traps them.
- **Effectiveness:** The non-fitted Caya diaphragm with spermicidal or barrier gel is 92% effective. Because the diaphragm may be used incorrectly, it is 75-80% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** vaginal irritation or penile irritation. It can increase your risk of getting vaginal and urinary tract infections.
- **Advantages:** you only need to use it when you have sex; it's reusable; there are minimal side effects; it doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to use it each time you have vaginal sex; you have to wait 6 hours before removing it; it fits most but not all bodies; you can't buy spermicidal gel in Canada; you have to buy barrier gel online or from specialty shops; you have to put it inside your vagina; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** Online or at specialty shops for about \$75-\$100. Spermicidal gel: online about \$15-18. Barrier gel: online or at specialty shops for about \$25. PPT Health Services doesn't sell or fit the diaphragm.

Fertility Awareness Methods

- **What:** different methods that help track your fertility/menstrual cycle and your body's fertility signs to predict when you are fertile.
- **How:** involves recording your periods, basal body temperature, and/or cervical mucus and position and avoiding vaginal sex or using another birth control method during fertile times.
- **Effectiveness:** FAMs can range from 95%-98% effective at preventing pregnancy depending on the method. Because they can be used incorrectly, they are closer to 76% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** none.
- **Advantages:** you don't need a prescription; there are no side effects; it's low/no cost; you learn about your body; it can help you get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to do something every day; you have to

| method | advantages | disadvantages | cost |
|-----------------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| pill | makes periods regular, shorter, lighter & less painful, reduces acne, don't have to do anything before/after sex | need to take every day, need a prescription, can't use with certain health problems | \$7-24/month at PPT |
| patch | makes periods regular, shorter, lighter & less painful, reduces acne, don't have to do anything before/after sex, only change once a week | visible and peach-coloured, need prescription, no STI protection, can't use with certain health problems | \$10/month at PPT |
| ring | makes periods regular, shorter, lighter & less painful, reduces acne, don't have to do anything before/after sex, only change once a month | need to touch your genitals, need a prescription, no STI protection, can't use with certain health problems | \$10/month at PPT |
| injection | makes periods lighter, may stop period, don't have to do anything before/after sex, only use it once every 12 weeks, can use if you can't use estrogen | uses needles, need to go to a clinic every 12 weeks, may stop period | \$18/3 months at PPT |
| hormonal IUD | makes periods lighter, may stop period, can last 5 years, don't have to do anything to make it work, can use if you can't use estrogen | inserted/removed by clinician, some risks & pain during insertion, small risk your body will push it out, may stop period | \$350-380 at PPT |
| implant | may stop period, can last 3 years, don't have to do anything to make it work, can use if you can't use estrogen | inserted/removed by clinician, can be visible, some risks & discomfort with insertion, may stop period | \$298 at PPT |
| copper IUD | can last 3/5/10 years, don't have to do anything to make it work, no hormones | inserted/removed by clinician, some risks & pain during insertion, small risk your body will push it out | \$44-60 at PPT |
| external condom | only use when you have sex, no prescription, no hormones, free/inexpensive, protects from STIs | need to do something before sex, penis must be fully erect, may need to check it's still on, not reusable | free at PPT |
| internal condom | only use when you have sex, no prescription, no hormones, can put in before sex, protects from STIs | need to do something before sex, may need to check it's not pushed inside, not reusable | free at PPT |
| spermicidal methods | only use when you have sex, no prescription, no hormones | must do something before sex, with film must wait 15 minutes after insertion, not reusable | \$18/pack at pharmacies |
| diaphragm | only use it when you have sex, no hormones, reusable, can put in before sex | must do something before sex, must wait 6 hours before removing it, may not fit all people, may be hard to find | \$75-100; gel \$23-30 |
| fertility awareness methods | no prescription, no hormones, learn about your body, can be free | must do something every day, must avoid vaginal sex during fertile times, takes time to learn, consultants expensive & hard to find | free; consultant fees vary |
| withdrawal | no prescription, only do it when you have sex, no hormones, free | must do every time you have sex, partner must know when to pull out | free |

Categories of birth control

- **Hormonal methods:** the pill, patch, ring, injection and the hormonal IUD (intrauterine device).
- **Non-hormonal methods:** the copper IUD, external (sometimes referred to as “male”) condoms, internal (sometimes referred to as “female”) condoms, vaginal contraceptive film, diaphragms, FAMS (Fertility Awareness Methods) and withdrawal.
- **Not included in this booklet:** progestin-only pills and sterilization (talk to your clinician for more info), implants and spermicidal jelly (not available in Canada), cervical caps and spermicidal foam (not readily available in Canada).
- **Remember:** only (external & internal) condoms protect you from both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms can be used in combination with hormonal or non-hormonal methods of birth control to protect you from STIs.

Hormonal Methods

Birth Control Pill

- **What:** a pill that contains 2 hormones (estrogen and progestin) that you take every day at the same time.
- **How:** the pill primarily prevents your ovaries from releasing an egg during ovulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the pill is 99% effective. Because it may be used incorrectly, it is 92%-97% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** nausea, breast tenderness, moodiness or spotting between periods, which should go away within the first 3 months. The pill slightly increases your risk of a blood clot, heart attack or stroke. Smoking increases that risk.
- **Advantages:** you don't have to do anything before or after sex; lighter/shorter periods; reduced menstrual cramps; reduced acne; it doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to take something every day; you need a prescription; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$20-35/month. At PPT Health Services

Internal (sometimes referred to as “female”) condom

- **What:** a loose fitting non-latex pouch that is inserted into the vagina up to 4 hours before vaginal sex.
- **How:** the internal condom catches the semen (cum) that contains the sperm and prevents it from entering the vagina.
- **Effectiveness:** the internal condom is 95% effective. Because it may be used incorrectly, it is 80% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** none.
- **Advantages:** you only need to use it when you have sex; you can insert it up to 4 hours in advance; it's easy to carry; you don't need a prescription; there are no side effects; it protects you from STIs; it doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to do something before you have sex; you have to check periodically to make sure it hasn't been pushed inside of you; it can be expensive; not all pharmacies carry it.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$10 for a box of 3. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, free.

Spermicidal Methods/Vaginal Contraceptive Film, Foam, or Gel

- **What:** a thin square of clear film, or a foam or gel in an applicator, that you put inside your vagina.
- **How:** they contain a chemical that kills sperm.
- **Effectiveness:** Spermicidal methods are 94% effective. Because it may be used incorrectly, they are 72% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** vaginal irritation or penile irritation. It can increase your risk of getting vaginal and urinary tract infections.
- **Advantages:** you only need to use it when you have sex; you don't need a prescription; it's easy to carry; there are minimal side effects; it doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to use one for each act of vaginal sex; if using the film you have to wait 15 minutes after you put it in before having vaginal sex; you must be comfortable putting it inside your vagina; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$18/box of 9 films or \$18/box of 6 foam or gel applicators.

Non-hormonal Methods

Copper IUD (intra-uterine device)

- **What:** a small “T-shaped” piece of plastic with a coil of copper around it that gets inserted by a clinician into your uterus.
- **How:** the copper IUD changes the chemistry of your uterus making it difficult for sperm to fertilize an egg.
- **Effectiveness:** the copper IUD is 99% effective.
- **Possible Side Effects:** heavier periods with increased cramping.
- **Advantages:** you don’t have to do anything before or after sex; you can leave it in for up to 5 years; once it is inserted you don’t have to do anything to make it work; there are no hormonal side effects; it doesn’t affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** it must be inserted and removed by a clinician; insertion is usually painful and comes with potential risks; there is a small risk your body will expel (push out) the IUD; getting an IUD can take 2 appointments; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$75-170. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, about \$50-75. PPT Health Services sells and inserts copper IUDs.

External (sometimes referred to as “male”) condom

- **What:** a thin covering, usually made of latex, worn over an erect penis.
- **How:** the condom catches the semen (cum) that contains the sperm and prevents it from entering the vagina.
- **Effectiveness:** the condom is 97% effective. Because condoms may be used incorrectly, they are 86% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** none. If you or your partner experience any irritation with condom use, use non-latex condoms.
- **Advantages:** you only need to use it when you have sex; it’s easy to carry; you don’t need a prescription; there are no side effects; it is inexpensive/free; it protects you from STIs; it doesn’t affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to do something right before you have sex every time; a partner’s penis has to be fully erect to put one on; you have to check periodically to make sure it’s still on; a partner must be willing to wear one.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$8-15/box of 6. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, free.

and sexual health clinics, about \$7-23/month.

Birth Control Patch/Evra

- **What:** a thin plastic patch that contains 2 hormones (estrogen and progestin) that you wear on your skin.
- **How:** the patch primarily prevents your ovaries from releasing an egg during ovulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the patch is 99% effective. Because it may be used incorrectly, it is 92%-97% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** skin irritation where the patch is worn; nausea, breast tenderness, moodiness or spotting between periods, which should go away within the first 3 months. The patch slightly increases your risk of a blood clot, heart attack or stroke. Smoking increases that risk.
- **Advantages:** you don’t have to do anything before or after sex; you only have to change it once a week; lighter/shorter periods; reduced menstrual cramps; reduced acne; it doesn’t affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** the patch is visible; it is a peach colour; you need a prescription; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$20/month. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, about \$10/month.

Birth Control Ring/Nuvaring

- **What:** a thin plastic ring that contains 2 hormones (estrogen and progestin) that you put inside your vagina.
- **How:** the ring primarily prevents your ovaries from releasing an egg during ovulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the ring is 99% effective. Because it may be used incorrectly, it is 92%-97% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** nausea, vaginal irritation, moodiness, breast tenderness and spotting between periods, which should go away within the first 3 months. The ring slightly increases your risk of a blood clot, heart attack or stroke. Smoking increases that risk.
- **Advantages:** you don’t have to do anything before or after sex; you only have to change it once a month; lighter/shorter periods; reduced menstrual cramps; reduced acne; it doesn’t affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** you must be comfortable putting something inside your vagina; you need a prescription; you may experience side effects.

- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$30/month. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, about \$10/month.

Injection/Depo Provera

- **What:** a shot or injection that contains one hormone (progestin) that you receive from a clinician in your arm or upper butt once every 12-13 weeks/3 months.
- **How:** the injection primarily prevents your ovaries from releasing an egg during ovulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the injection is 99.7% effective. Because it may be used incorrectly, it is 97% effective with typical use.
- **Possible Side Effects:** irregular periods for the first few months and eventually, for many people, no period at all while using the injection. Other possible side effects are weight gain, mood changes/low mood, decreased bone strength. It can delay your ability to get pregnant for up to 9 months after the last injection
- **Advantages:** you only have to do something once every 3 months; the injection can lighten, reduce and eventually stop your periods; you can use it if you can't use methods with estrogen.
- **Disadvantages:** you have to get an injection; you need to get to a clinic every 3 months; you need a prescription; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$35/3 months. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, about \$18/3 months.

Hormonal IUD (intra-uterine device)/Mirena/Kyleena

- **What:** a small "T-shaped" piece of plastic with a band around it containing one hormone (progestin) that gets inserted into your uterus by a clinician. It is effective for up to 5 years.
- **How:** the hormonal IUD changes the chemistry of your uterus making it difficult for sperm to fertilize an egg. It also makes it harder for sperm to get through the mucus in your cervix (the opening to your vagina) and into your uterus to fertilize an egg and in some people, it may interfere with ovulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the hormonal IUD is 99.8% effective.
- **Possible Side Effects:** lighter periods, irregular periods, spotting between periods, and eventually for some people no period at all while the IUD is in place. Other possible but uncommon side effects are moodchanges/low mood & acne.
- **Advantages:** you can leave it in for up to 5 years once it is inserted; you don't have to do anything to make it work; it can lighten, reduce

and eventually stop your periods; you can use it if you can't use methods with estrogen; it doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.

- **Disadvantages:** it must be inserted and removed by a clinician; insertion is usually painful and comes with potential risks; there is a small risk your body will expel (push out) the IUD; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$375-\$550. At PPT Health Services and sexual health clinics, about \$350-\$380. PPT Health Services sells and inserts hormonal IUDs.

Implant/Nexplanon/Implanon

- **What:** a 4cm plastic rod containing one hormone (progestin) that gets inserted under the skin of your upper arm by a clinician.
- **How:** the implant primarily prevents your ovaries from releasing an egg during ovulation.
- **Effectiveness:** the implant is 99.6% effective.
- **Possible Side Effects:** lighter periods, irregular periods, and eventually for some people no period at all while the implant is in place, longer or heavier periods, bleeding or spotting between periods. Other possible side effects include headaches, acne, breast/chest tenderness, mood changes.
- **Advantages:** you don't have to do anything before or after sex; you can leave it in for up to 3 years; once it is inserted you don't have to do anything to make it work; it can lighten, reduce and eventually stop your periods; you can use it if you can't use methods with estrogen; it doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- **Disadvantages:** it must be inserted and removed by a clinician; insertion can cause pain or irritation and comes with potential risks; there is a small risk the implant could move inside your body; it can be visible on some people; you may experience side effects.
- **Cost:** at pharmacies, about \$350-\$450. PPT Health Services places implants and sells them for around \$300.