

Hormonal Methods

Hormonal contraceptive methods work by preventing ovulation and/or by thickening the cervical mucous, thus blocking sperm from entering the uterus. These methods typically contain a synthetic progestin and an estrogen. Some contain only progestins.

Type	Male or Female	Pregnancy Prevention?	Protection from STIs?	Is it reversible?	Brief description of use	Effectiveness*	Prescription needed?
The Pill	Female	yes	no	Yes, could take 1-3 months	Take pill daily at the same time each day. There are multiple types of pills, some have just progestins and some have estrogens and progestins. Some allow the user to skip menstruation.	Perfect use: 99.7%; typical use: 92%	Yes (for most brands, but Opill is now available OTC)
Vaginal ring (e.g., NuvaRing)	Female	yes	no	Yes, could take 1-3 months	Insert ring into vagina, leave for 3 weeks then remove for 1 week. Insert new ring	Perfect use: 99.7%; typical use: 92%	Yes
Patch	Female	yes	no	Yes, could take 1-3 months	Place patch on skin for designated time, remove for 1 week. Put on new patch	Perfect use: 99.7%; typical use: 92%	Yes
Implant (e.g., Implanon; Nexplanon)	Female	yes	no	Yes, could take 1-3 months	The implant is inserted under the skin and can remain for 5 years.	Perfect use: 99%; typical use: 99%	Yes, inserted by physician
Injection (e.g., Depo-Provera)	Female	yes	no	Yes, could take months for cycles to return	Injection given by physician every 3 months	Perfect use: 99.7%; typical use: 99.7%	Yes
Hormonal IUD (e.g., Mirena, Skyla, Kyleena, Liletta)	Female	yes	no	Yes, once IUD is removed could take 1-3 months	Once inserted by physician, just check string monthly. Good for 5 yrs	Perfect use: 99.9%; typical use: 99.9%	Yes, inserted by physician

Barrier Methods

Barrier contraceptive methods work by blocking sperm from entering the uterus. Some of these methods are also effective at preventing sexually transmitted infections

Type	Male or female	Pregnancy Prevention?	Protection from STIs?	Is it reversible?	Brief description of use	Effectiveness*	Prescription needed?
Male condom	Male	yes	yes	Yes, immediately	Open package, place on erect penis, roll on	Pregnancy: Perfect use: 98%; typical use: 83-87%	no
Female condom	Female	yes	yes	Yes, immediately	Open package, pinch ring, insert into vagina	Pregnancy: Perfect use: 95%, typical use: 79-85%	no
Paragard IUD	Female	yes	no	Yes, once IUD removed	Once inserted by physician, just check string monthly. Good for 10 yrs	Perfect use: 99.4%, typical use: 99.4%	Yes, inserted by physician
Sponge	Female	yes	no	Yes, immediately	Insert up to 24 hr prior to intercourse, leave in place for 6 hrs after	Perfect use: 89-91%; typical use: 82-85%	no
Diaphragm	Female	yes	May give slight protection	Yes, immediately	Insert up to 2 hrs before intercourse, leave in place for at least 8 hrs after. Typically used with spermicide (e.g., jelly or foam)	Perfect use: 94%, typical use: 84%	No, but fitted by a physician

***Effectiveness:** Measured with the Pearl Index, introduced by Raymond Pearl in 1933. Not a perfect measure but tries to estimate failure over time. Example: 2% failure rate is not 2/100 women, but the number of unintended pregnancies out of 100 women over the course of a year. Say there are 100 couples. Each couple has vaginal intercourse 52x over the course of the year. So, with a 2% failure, 2 women would end up pregnant, but that is out of the 5,200 acts of intercourse.

Chemical Methods

Chemical methods of contraception work by killing or inactivating sperm.

Type	Male or female	Pregnancy Prevention?	Protection from STIs?	Is it reversible?	Brief description of use	Effectiveness*	Prescription needed?
Spermicide	Both	yes	no	Yes, immediately	Apply no more than 60 min prior to intercourse, leave in place for 6-8 hr after	Perfect use: 82%; typical use: 71-74%	no

Surgical Methods

Surgical methods of contraception work by severing part of the reproductive tract.

Type	Male or female	Pregnancy Prevention?	Protection from STIs?	Is it reversible?	Brief description of use	Effectiveness*	Prescription needed?
Vasectomy	Male	yes	no	Sometimes, rarely	Vas deferentia are cut to prevent sperm from entering ejaculate. Effective 12 weeks after surgery	Perfect and typical use: 99.9%	Performed by physician
Tubal Ligation	Female	yes	no	Sometimes, rarely	The fallopian tubes are cut and tied off to prevent sperm from reaching egg. Effective after 1 cycle	Perfect and typical use: 99.5%	Performed by physician

Behavioral Methods

Behavioral methods of contraception rely on one or both partners to alter their sexual activity in order to prevent or decrease the likelihood of gamete interaction.

Type	Male or female	Pregnancy Prevention?	Protection from STIs?	Is it reversible?	Brief description of use	Effectiveness*	Prescription needed?
Rhythm method	Female	yes	no	Yes, immediately	Need to carefully and consistently monitor fertility symptoms	Perfect use: 91%; typical use75-80%	no
Pull out	Male	yes	no	Yes, immediately	Relies on male to withdraw penis before ejaculation	Perfect use: 96%; typical use 82%	no

Note: all information on this handout was compiled from Planned Parenthood and the CDC (prior to 2025).