
Get the facts about...

Intra-uterine Contraceptive Device (IUCD)

Choosing birth control...

There are two ways to enjoy sex without getting pregnant...sex other than vaginal intercourse or vaginal intercourse with birth control. The use of birth control is an individual and private matter. It affects your body, relationships and lifestyle. There is no perfect choice in birth control. Get the facts you need and talk to people you trust. Choose a method that's right for you. Always use male latex or female condoms along with your birth control method to lower your chances of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV - the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Why choose an IUCD?

The intra-uterine contraceptive device (IUCD) is 98-99% effective in preventing pregnancy. Once it is in place, you won't have to worry about birth control for up to five years.

Does it protect me from STIs and HIV?

No. Always use male latex or female condoms to reduce your risk of getting an STI, including HIV.

What is an IUCD?

An IUCD is a small piece of plastic that a doctor or nurse inserts into your uterus through the vagina to prevent pregnancy. It is about 1½ inches (4 cm) long. There are several different types of IUCDs. The most common IUCD is T-shaped and coated with copper. Another type of IUCD (brand name *Mirena*) contains a hormone (progestin) that is slowly released.

How does an IUCD work?

- The copper of a copper IUCD creates an environment which is unfriendly towards sperm and eggs.
- The copper also destroys sperm.
- Using an IUCD may thicken the mucus at the cervix (progestin-releasing IUCDs) so that sperm can't get into the uterus.

How do I use an IUCD?

- If you decide to use an IUCD, you will need to have an examination to check for pregnancy or any infections.
- A doctor or nurse has to insert an IUCD. The best time to do this is during your period, but it can be inserted any time.
- The doctor or nurse will do a pelvic exam and then insert a speculum (instrument) into your vagina so that she or he can see your cervix and wash it with an antiseptic solution.
- Next the doctor will insert an IUCD into your uterus. This may be uncomfortable and you may want to ask for pain pills ahead of time.
- An IUCD can be left in the uterus for up to five years.
- Some doctors will leave the two plastic threads or strings that hang down through the cervix into the vagina. The cervix is the opening to the uterus. The threads or strings are very thin and do not hang outside the body. You can check that the IUCD is still in place by feeling for these strings.
- Some doctors will cut the strings so that you cannot feel them.

What do I do if I want my IUCD taken out?

If you feel uncomfortable or have side-effects and want to have your IUCD taken out, you *must* see a doctor or nurse. Do not try to take an IUCD out by yourself.

Are there any side effects?

Minor side-effects...

- cramping and discomfort when the IUCD is put in (mild to moderate)
- heavier and more painful periods
- irregular bleeding
- Acne, breast tenderness, headaches (with *Mirena*)

Serious side-effects...

A small number of women suffer more serious side-

effects such as infections, a punctured uterus or infertility.

Call your doctor immediately if you have:

- bleeding (heavy or continuous)
- fever/chills
- an unusual smell coming from your vagina which may indicate infection
- backache (severe)
- cramps (severe)

What are the advantages of an IUCD?

- This is an effective method of birth control.
- You don't have to think about birth control when you have sex.
- It can be used for a long period of time.
- The copper IUD can be used by women who can't or don't wish to use hormonal methods.

What are the disadvantages of an IUCD?

- An IUCD doesn't protect against HIV or other STIs.
- If you get an STI with an IUCD in place, there is a greater chance of getting pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID could cause scarring in your reproductive organs. You may not be able to have children as a result.
- An IUCD can increase your chances of having an ectopic pregnancy (e.g. pregnancy that grows in a fallopian tube).
- You may need to check the strings to make sure the IUCD is still in place.
- There is a small chance that your uterus will push the IUCD out. (This is more likely for a woman who has never had a baby.)
- Not all doctors insert IUCDs.

Where can I get more information about IUCDs?

You can get more information from your public health nurse, community health clinic, or doctor. You can call the *Facts of Life Line* to talk about birth control, sexuality, relationships, STIs, or pregnancy options. **Call 947-9222 in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-432-1957.**

You can also check out these websites: <http://www.serc.mb.ca>
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/iud-4245.htm>