

## What You Should Know About ...

See Glossary section for definitions of underlined words.

# IUD - Intra-Uterine Device

### What is an IUD?

- An IUD is a small piece of plastic that a health care provider inserts into your uterus to prevent pregnancy.
- The most common IUD is T- shaped with a copper wire wrapped around it.

### How does it work?

- The copper wire on the IUD changes conditions inside the uterus so that sperm cannot live.
- The IUD will prevent pregnancy 99% of the time. It is about as effective as tying your tubes.
- Some IUDs can stay in place for up to 5 years.

### Where can I get an IUD?

- See a health care provider who will give you a prescription for an IUD.
- Take your prescription to a pharmacy to buy the IUD.
- Take the IUD back to your health care provider to have it put in.
- An IUD can be expensive. If cost is a problem, talk to your health care provider. (Some doctors or community clinics have a supply of IUDs in their offices.)

### How do I use an IUD?

- Your health care provider will examine you to check for pregnancy or any infections.
- The health care provider will do a pelvic exam (internal exam). She/he will insert a speculum (instrument) into your vagina to see your cervix and wash it with an antiseptic solution.
- Next, she/he will insert an IUD into your uterus through the vagina. This can feel uncomfortable so you may want to ask for pain pills ahead of time.
- The health care provider will leave the two plastic threads or strings that hang down through the cervix into the vagina. These strings are very thin and do not hang outside the body.
- You may want to check the strings from time to time to make sure they are still there. This means the IUD is still in place.

### When should I start using an IUD?

- An IUD can be inserted at any time. Some health care providers prefer to insert them during your period.

### Does an IUD protect me from STIs and HIV?

- **NO.** Always use a latex or polyurethane male condom or a female condom when you have sex. This will reduce the risk of getting an STI (sexually transmitted infection), including HIV infection.

### Are there any side effects?

*Minor side effects include:*

- Cramping and discomfort when the IUD is put in.
- Heavier and more painful periods
- The IUD falls out.

*Serious side effects are rare, but can include:*

- Ectopic pregnancy
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)

## What else do I need to know?

- If you get a sexually transmitted infection (STI) with an IUD in place, you may get PID. PID could damage your reproductive organs. You may not be able to have children in the future.
- You may have an STI and not have any symptoms. If you have had unprotected sex, it is important to go to a community health clinic or walk-in clinic and ask for an STI test.
- See your health care provider at once if you have any signs of an infection, such as fever, chills, unusual discharge or smelly discharge. You need to receive treatment to stop the infection from developing into PID.

If the IUD is not right for you, talk to your health care provider about IUS or “Mirena”.

## What do I do if I want my IUD taken out?

- If you want to have your IUD taken out, you **must** see a health care provider. Do not try to take an IUD out by yourself.

## What do I do if my IUD comes out?

- Call your health care provider and use another kind of birth control such as condoms.

## Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse.
- From the Facts of Life On-Line: e-mail your questions to [thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca](mailto:thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca).
- From the website: [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca).

**If your IUD comes out, and if you don't want to get pregnant, see a health care provider or pharmacist for emergency contraception as soon as you can.**

## Glossary:

**Cervix** – The lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. It is also called the “neck of the uterus”.

**Ectopic pregnancy** – A pregnancy which starts to grow in one of the fallopian tubes, instead of inside the uterus.

**Emergency Contraception** – Medication used to avoid pregnancy after sex when you didn't use birth control or the birth control didn't work (for example, the condom broke).

**Fallopian Tube** – The egg travels down this tube from the ovary to the uterus.

**Pelvic inflammatory diseases (PID)** – An infection of the uterus, the fallopian tubes or ovaries, which is caused by bacteria. It can lead to infertility if it is not treated. Early treatment of PID is the best way to prevent infertility and other health problems.

**Sexually Transmitted Infection** – Infections caused by viruses or bacteria that are passed from one person to another through sex. They are also called STDs or STIs.

**Speculum** – A plastic or metal instrument inserted into the vagina to spread the vaginal walls apart so the cervix can be examined.

**Sperm** – The male reproductive cell; carried out of the penis in the semen during ejaculation

**Uterus** – A pear-shaped, muscular organ. A fetus grows in the uterus during pregnancy. The uterus is also called the “womb”.

**Vagina** – The muscular tube inside a woman's body where the menstrual blood comes out from the uterus, where a baby comes out from the uterus during childbirth, and where a penis can go in for vaginal intercourse.