

What You Should Know About ...

See Glossary section for definitions of underlined words.

IUS - Intra-Uterine System (Mirena)

What is an IUS (Mirena)?

- An IUS is a small piece of plastic that a health care provider can insert into your uterus to prevent pregnancy.
- It is T-shaped. It has a small reservoir that slowly releases a hormone.

How does an IUS work?

- The IUS reservoir releases the hormone progestin into the lining of the uterus.
- The hormone makes the cervical mucous thicker. This makes it harder for sperm to get into the uterus.
- The hormone also thins the lining of the uterus, making it harder for a fertilized egg to stick to the uterus. Even if an egg is released and fertilized, it will not continue to grow.
- Some women do not ovulate when they are using an IUS.
- It prevents pregnancy 99.9% of the time.
- An IUS can prevent pregnancy for up to 5 years.

Where can I get an IUS?

- See a health care provider who will give you a prescription.
- Take your prescription to a pharmacy to buy the IUS.
- Take the IUS back to your health care provider to have it put in.
- It can be expensive. If cost is a problem, talk to your health care provider.

How do I use an IUS?

- 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). S/he will insert a speculum (instrument) into your vagina to see your cervix and wash it with an antiseptic solution.
- Next, s/he will insert an IUS into your uterus. In most cases this takes only a few minutes. It 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 IUS is still in place.

Does an IUS protect me from STIs or HIV?

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

Are there side effects?

Minor side effects include:

- Some discomfort when the IUS is put in
- Irregular bleeding for the first three to six months
- No period after one year of use for some women

Serious side effects are rare, but include:

- Ectopic pregnancy
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

What else do I need to know?

- If you get a sexually transmitted infection (STI) with an IUS 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.

What do I do if my IUS comes out?

- Call your health care provider.
- Use another kind of birth control, such as condoms.

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

- You must see a health care provider. Do not try to take an IUS out by yourself.

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.

If your IUS 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:

Cervical mucus – The fluid produced by the cervix. The mucus changes at different times of the menstrual cycle. Around the time of ovulation, the mucus is clear and slippery.

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.

Ovulate – To produce and release an egg (ovum) from an ovary.

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

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.

Uterus – A pear-shaped, muscular organ. The 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.