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OFFICE OF POPULATION AFFAIRS

Intrauterine Device (IUD)

THE FACTS

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services | 200 Independence Avenue, S.W. Washington, D.C., 20003

Intrauterine Device (IUD)
THE FACTS

Quick Facts

Effectiveness in Preventing Pregnancy:

- Of 100 women using IUDs for a year, about one may become pregnant. IUDs are better at preventing pregnancy than condoms, the pill, the patch, the ring, and the shot.

Use:

- You must have a health care provider insert an IUD into the uterus. An IUD is effective for 3-10+ years, depending on the type that is used.

STI Protection:

- No

Office Visit Required:

- Yes, only available through a health care provider.

What is an Intrauterine Device (IUD)?

An IUD is a small T-shaped device that is put in the uterus by a healthcare provider. It sits in your uterus and your cervix keeps it in place. Once it's in, you can't feel it. Three types are available in the US:

- The *ParaGard* IUD, also known as the Copper T IUD, is made with copper and plastic. It prevents pregnancy by blocking sperm from reaching or fertilizing the egg, and may prevent implantation.
- The *Mirena* IUD contains the hormone, progestin. Hormones are chemicals that control how different parts of your body work. The progestin causes cervical mucus to thicken and the lining of the uterus to thin. This keeps the sperm from reaching the egg.
- The *Skyla* IUD is the newest IUD in the US. It works like *Mirena* but releases less progestin and is a little smaller in size.

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How do I use it?

An IUD is placed through your vagina and cervix and into your uterus by a health care provider. The ParaGard IUD will prevent pregnancy right away. It may take a week for the Mirena or Skyla IUD to begin working, so ask if you need to use a back-up birth control method (like a condom) in the meantime.

Once in place, ParaGard IUDs are effective for 10 years or more. The Mirena IUD will last for at least five years and the Skyla IUD for three years. But any IUD can be taken out at any time. Just ask your healthcare provider.

It is common for women to have some mild discomfort, cramping, and spotting after the IUD is first inserted. In most cases, this will become milder or go away in a few weeks or months. Ask your health care provider about what types of symptoms you should expect.

Your health care provider may also ask you to check your IUD strings on your own between visits to make sure they can be felt in your vagina. They will tell you more about how to do this.

Very rarely, an IUD may come out of your uterus on its own. This is more common in women who have never had a baby. If the IUD comes out, do not try to put it back yourself. Call your healthcare provider and they will insert another one for you.

How do I get it?

An IUD can only be inserted by a health care professional. Most family planning clinics offer IUDs. To search for a family planning center near you, go to http://www.hhs.gov/opa/

How effective is it?

Of 100 women who use an IUD each year, less than one may become pregnant. IUDs are better at preventing pregnancy than condoms, the pill, the patch, the ring, and the shot.

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Advantages of an IUD

- Safe and effective in preventing pregnancy—even more effective than other methods of reversible birth control
- Along with implants, IUDs are the most cost-effective reversible method of birth control
- IUDs work for many years.
- IUDs can be taken out at any time if you want to get pregnant or are unhappy with it
- The Copper T IUD can also be used as emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy if inserted within five days after unprotected sex
- There is nothing you have to remember, which can be great for people who have a hard time remembering or don't want to remember to use other methods like the pill, patch, or ring.
- Your male partner doesn't have to know about it or do anything different.

Drawbacks of an IUD

- Requires a clinic visit for insertion
- Provides no protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV
- May cause side effects like cramping and irregular bleeding
- While not common, a few women may develop pelvic infections with an IUD, most often within three weeks after insertion.
- Rarely, IUDs will come out of the uterus.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Unintended Pregnancy Prevention: Contraception

Food and Drug Administration

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- Birth Control: Medicines to Help You

Office on Women's Health

- Girlshealth.gov: Types of Birth Control

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