



Family Planning and Contraception

A General Guide To The Different Forms Of Contraception

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This leaflet contains basic information about pregnancy and gives an outline of the various methods of contraception. If you have any further questions or are uncertain about particular issues then seek your doctor's advice or consult your local family planning service.

How Does A Pregnancy occur?

Pregnancy occurs when a sperm from the male meets and enters an egg from a woman. This happens following sexual intercourse when a man ejaculates and fluid containing sperm is released from the penis. If this fluid is released in the vagina or gets in contact with vaginal fluids near the entrance of the vagina it can travel up the vagina towards the womb where it can meet and fertilise the egg. Conception occurs when the egg is fertilised by the sperm. The woman is fertile once a month when the egg is released from the ovary.

What Is Contraception?

Contraception occurs when the man's sperm is prevented from meeting the woman's egg. This can be done in a number of ways and a summary of each method is contained in the table inside the back cover.

What type of contraception should you use?

There is no such thing as an ideal method of contraception. Different kinds are acceptable to different people. Check with your doctor or family planning clinic on the forms of contraception that are available. This will help you choose the method which best suit your lifestyle.

Sex, AIDS and other Sexually Transmissible Diseases

Neither the pill nor most other forms of contraception offer protection from infection by sexually transmissible diseases or by HIV, which leads to AIDS. If you are not in a one faithful partner relationship with someone who is faithful to you then the use of good quality, new condom during intercourse will reduce the risk of infection.

Myths about Pregnancy

There are many myths about pregnancy and how it occurs. The following points may help clarify areas of uncertainty.

- *Pregnancy can occur even the first time intercourse takes place.
- *Pregnancy can occur if the mans sperm comes in contact with vaginal fluids, even without penetration of the vagina by the penis.
- *Withdrawal (coitus interruptus) is not an effective method of contraception.
- *Douching (washing of the vagina) even immediately after intercourse will not prevent pregnancy
- *Breastfeeding does not always prevent pregnancy.
- *There are no special lovemaking positions which make conception less likely to occur.

Planning a family

Apart from sterilisation all other forms of contraception are temporary. Sometimes it can take a week or even months for a return to fertility following the use of hormonal contraceptives. By using a sensible and responsible approach to family planning you can have a baby knowing it will be wanted and loved.

A GUIDE TO DIFFERENT FORMS OF CONTACEPTIVES

| Form of Contraception | How it works | Points to consider |
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| Natural Methods | | |
| Billings (Ovulation or mucus method) | The mucus from the vagina is observed during the full cycle. Normally clear stretchy mucus indicates fertility | Can take time to learn this method and may be difficult to differentiate mucus types. |
| Temperature method | Temperature is measured (usually 1 st thing every morning) during each day of the cycle. When an egg is released by the ovary (ovualtion) the body temperature rises. | Temperature may rise due to illness or flu giving a false indication of ovulation. |
| Sympto-thermal method | Based on the observation of both mucus and by daily recording. | Careful record keeping is need and couples must abstain (or use another method) during the fertile time. Extra care is needed for women with irregular cycles or during the menopause. |
| Artificial methods | | |
| Combined Pill (comes in monthly packs) | Made up of 2 hormones – oestrogen and progesterone. Taken by the woman daily it prevents ovulation (the release of an egg from the ovary every month) | Is not suitable for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - women over 35 years, - diabetics - those with a history of thrombosis or who suffer from blood pressure - smokers Is not effective if taken over 12 hours late. Sickness, diarrhoea |

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| | | and some drugs may interfere with it working. |
| Progesterone only pill | Taken by the woman daily it causes changes in the womb preventing sperm joining with the egg and settling in the womb | Monthly cycle may be irregular. Not effective if taken over 3 hours late. Sickness, Diarrhoea and some other drugs may interfere with it working |
| Injectable Contraceptives | The hormone progesterone prevents ovulation. It is injected into the muscle, where it is slowly released, giving protection for up to 12 weeks. | Periods often become irregular. A return of regular periods and fertility may take up to a year after using this method. |
| Intrauterine-devices (I.U.D) | A small object made up of plastic or copper which is inserted into the womb by a doctor. It prevents the egg meeting the sperm or from settling in the womb. | Periods may be heavier. Some women may develop pelvic infections. Not recommended for younger women who have not been pregnant. Must be replaced every 3 – 5 years |
| Cap or Diaphragm and Spermicide | The cap or Diaphragm is a rubber device, placed in the vagina before intercourse. It forms a barrier across the entrance to the womb and so prevents the sperm from reaching an egg. | Is ineffective unless used with a spermicide (chemical which kills sperm). Must be left in place for 6 hours after intercourse. Must be checked every 6 months, after a loss or gain of more than 3 kg (½ stone) or child-birth, to ensure that it fits correctly. |
| Condom | <p>Made of thin rubber (latex) the condom is placed over the erect penis before intercourse. It traps the sperm and prevents them entering the vagina. Some condoms are lubricated. Some are lubricated with spermicide.</p> <p>The female condom combines features of a male condom and a diaphragm. It consists of an approximately 17cm long polyurethane bag with inner and outer rings. The inner ring is inserted into the vagina and fits over the cervix. The outer ring hangs outside the entrance to the vagina. The female condom thus traps the sperm in much the same way as the male condom.</p> | <p>Reliability depends on correct and careful use. A new condom should be placed on the erect penis before it touches the woman's vaginal area. It should be held in place while the penis is being withdrawn, making sure that no sperm spill on the vaginal area. Only condoms with an approved quality mark should be used.</p> <p>Easily inserted but needs practice. Compares favourably with male condom with regard to effectiveness. Some claim discomfort associated with rings which seems to diminish with familiarity with this method. More expensive than male condoms. They do give the woman more control over fertility</p> |
| Sponge | A polyurethane foam sponge which contains a spermicide, is inserted into the vagina, covering the entrance to the womb. It is effective for 24 hours and must be left in place for 6 hours after intercourse. | It can have a high failure rate. Some women may be allergic to the spermicide. Limited availability in chemist shops and clinics. Must be removed after 30 hours. |
| Female sterilisation | An abdominal operation closes off the fallopian tubes (down which each egg travels to the womb every month) so that the egg cannot meet the sperm | Very occasionally tubes can rejoin and fertility returns. Is generally permanent, so careful thought must be given before having the operation. |
| Male sterilisation | The tubes leading from each testicle to the penis are cut so that sperm can no longer enter the semen. Can be done under local anaesthetic | It takes up to 4 months for all stored sperm to clear from the tubes, so another form of contraception must be used during this time. It does not effect the man's virility. Is generally permanent, so again there should be no doubt that a family will not be wanted in later years. |

Further help and advice

Your local general practitioner or family planning clinic will answer further questions that you may have.