

## What is contraception?

Contraception is a way to prevent pregnancy. There are many different types of contraception and they all work in a different way.

## How does contraception work?

Different types of contraception work in different ways.

**Barrier methods** of contraception include the external (male) condom, internal (female) condom and the diaphragm. These methods work by providing a physical barrier that prevents the sperm from reaching the egg. The external and internal condoms are the only contraception that also provides protection against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

**Hormonal methods** of contraception include the pill, mini-pill, vaginal ring, hormonal IUD, implant and injection. The way they work varies. Some work by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month (e.g. the pill, vaginal ring, hormonal implant, and hormonal injection). Others work by making the mucus at the entrance to the uterus thicker so that sperm can't get through to meet an egg (e.g. mini pill). Others are toxic to both the egg and sperm which stops the egg from being fertilised (e.g. hormonal IUD).

**Non-hormonal methods** of contraception include the copper IUD. The copper IUD works by being toxic to the egg and sperm which stops sperm from fertilising the egg and changing the lining of the uterus to make it unable to support a fertilised egg.

**Emergency methods** of contraception include the emergency contraceptive pills and the copper IUD. Emergency contraceptive pills work by stopping or delaying the release of an egg from a woman's ovaries – they do not cause an abortion.

**Fertility awareness methods** work by predicting when you will be most fertile each cycle and avoiding having sex at those times. They require specific education from experts in this field.

Permanent methods of contraception include tubal ligation (female sterilisation) and vasectomy (male sterilisation).

Tubal ligation involves an operation to block the fallopian tubes to stop the passage of the egg. Vasectomy involves an operation on the vas deferens to prevent sperm from being ejaculated.

## How well do the different methods of contraception work?

Some methods of contraception are more effective than others. Some methods of contraception are less effective in real life situations because of the way they are used. The most effective reversible methods are the "fit and forget" long acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) – which include IUDs and implants.

Advantages	Effectiveness	
	Perfect use	Typical use
Tubal ligation	99.5%	99.5%
Vasectomy	99.5%	99.5%
Hormonal IUD (Mirena & Kyleena)	99.7% – 99.9%	99.7% – 99.9%
Copper IUD	99.5%	99.5%
Hormonal implant (Implanon)	99.95%	99.95%
Hormonal injection (DMPA)	99.8%	96%
Pill (combined oral contraceptive pill)	99.5%	93%
Mini-pill (progestogen only pill)	99.5%	93%
Vaginal ring (NuvaRing)	99.5%	93%
External (male) condom	98%	88%
Internal (female) condom	95%	79%
Diaphragm	86%	82%
Fertility awareness methods (FAM)	95% - 99.5%	76% - 93%



The emergency contraceptive pill is taken after unprotected intercourse to prevent a pregnancy. There are two types available over the counter at pharmacies without a prescription. They are around 85% effective at preventing a pregnancy and are most effective if they are taken within the first 24 hours. They can be used up until 5 days after unprotected intercourse.

### How do I work out which method of contraception is right for me?

To decide which contraception is right for you, it is helpful to have accurate information on:

- how effective each method is at preventing pregnancy
- how the method works
- health issues and other medicines you take which may limit some choices
- ease of use
- risks and side effects including changes to periods and hormonal side effects
- benefits other than contraception
- cost and availability
- reversibility
- protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Your doctor or nurse should be able to provide you with all of this information. You can also find out more about each of the methods of contraception in our other factsheets.

### For more information

- Visit your nearest Family Planning Australia clinic [fpnsw.org.au/clinics](https://fpnsw.org.au/clinics)
- Chat to a nurse via Talkline – 1300 658 886 or [fpnsw.org.au/talkline](https://fpnsw.org.au/talkline)
- National Relay Service (for people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing or have speech communication difficulties) – 133 677
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) – 131 450
- Family Planning NSW client resource on contraception – What suits me? [fpnsw.org.au/health-information/contraception/contraception-options](https://fpnsw.org.au/health-information/contraception/contraception-options)