

Thinking of an IUCD?

An IUD is a small T-shaped plastic and copper device that's put into your womb (uterus). It releases copper to stop you getting pregnant and protects against pregnancy for between 5 and 10 years. It's sometimes called a "coil" or "copper coil".

How it works

The IUD is similar to the Mirena IUS, but instead of releasing the hormone progesterone like the IUS, the IUD releases copper into the womb.

It is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy.

The copper alters the cervical mucus, which makes it more difficult for sperm to reach an egg and survive. It can also stop a fertilised egg from being able to implant itself.

IUDs last for 5-10 years depending on the type. If you're 40 or over when you have an IUD fitted, it can be left in until you reach the menopause or you no longer need contraception.

Who can use an IUD

Most women can use an IUD, a GP will ask about your medical history to check if an IUD is suitable for you.

The IUD may not be suitable if you:

- think you might be pregnant
- have an untreated STI or a pelvic infection
- have problems with your womb or cervix
- have unexplained bleeding between periods or after sex

Women who have had an ectopic pregnancy or who have an artificial heart valve must consult their GP or clinician before having an IUD fitted.

Using an IUD after giving birth

An IUD can usually be fitted 4 weeks after giving birth (vaginal or caesarean). You'll need to use alternative contraception from 3 weeks (21 days) after the birth until the IUD is put in.

It's safe to use an IUD when you're breastfeeding, and it will not affect your milk supply.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the IUD

Although an IUD is an effective method of contraception, there are some things to consider before having one fitted.

Advantages:

- It protects against pregnancy for between 5 and 10 years, depending on the type.
- Once an IUD is fitted, it works straight away.
- Most women can use it.
- There are no hormonal side effects, such as acne, headaches or breast tenderness.
- It does not interrupt sex.
- It's safe to use an IUD if you're breastfeeding.
- It's possible to get pregnant as soon as the IUD is removed.
- It's not affected by other medicines.
- There's no evidence that an IUD will affect your weight or increase the risk of cervical, uterine or ovarian cancers

Disadvantages:

- Your periods may become heavier, longer or more painful, though this may improve after a few months.
- It does not protect against STIs, so you may need to use condoms as well.
- If you get an infection when you have an IUD fitted, it could lead to a pelvic infection if not treated.
- Most women who stop using an IUD do so because of vaginal bleeding and pain, although these side effects are uncommon.

Risks of the IUD

Pelvic infections

There's a very small chance of getting a pelvic infection in the first 20 days after the IUD has been inserted. You may be advised to have a check for any existing infections before an IUD is fitted.

Thrush

There's some limited evidence that if you have an IUD fitted, you may have a slightly higher chance of getting thrush that keeps coming back.

Speak to a GP if you have an IUD and keep getting thrush. You might want to think about trying a different type of contraception.

Rejection

It's not common (1 in 20) but the IUD can be rejected (expelled) by the womb or it can move (displacement).

If this happens, it's usually soon after it has been fitted. You will be taught how to check that your IUD is in place.

Damage to the womb

In rare cases (2 in 1000), an IUD can make a hole in the womb wall when it's put in. This may be painful, but often there are no symptoms.

This risk is extremely low. But see a GP straight away if you're feeling pain, as you may need surgery to remove the IUD.

Ectopic pregnancy

If the IUD fails and you become pregnant, there's also a small increased risk of ectopic pregnancy.

How to tell if it's still in place

An IUD has two thin threads that hang down a little way from your womb into the top of your vagina.

The GP that fits your IUD will teach you how to feel for these threads and check that it's still in place.

Check your IUD is in place a few times in the first month and then after each period, or at regular intervals.

It's very unlikely that your IUD will come out, but if you cannot feel the threads or think it's moved, you may not be protected against pregnancy.

See a GP or nurse straight away and use additional contraception, such as condoms, until your IUD has been checked. If you have had sex recently, you may need to use emergency contraception.

Your partner should not be able to feel your IUD during sex. If they can, see a GP/nurse for a check-up.

Removing an IUD

Your IUD can be removed at any time by a trained doctor or nurse.

If you're not having another IUD put in and do not want to get pregnant, use additional contraception, such as condoms, for 7 days before you have it removed.

It's possible to get pregnant as soon as the IUD has been taken out.

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