There are many options when it comes to birth control. They all have their strong points and weak points and the decision on what to use is very personal. The following table is a brief summary of the methods available to help start the discussion of what method is best for you. Further discussion with a healthcare provider is encouraged to gain a better understanding of the options being considered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Strong Points</th>
<th>Weak Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral Methods:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstinence</td>
<td>There is some variation on the definition of abstinence varying from no sexual contact to no intercourse only. It is the only method, if used in a stricter sense, that will prevent spread of STIs and pregnancy.</td>
<td>- no pregnancy risk&lt;br&gt;- little/no risk for STI&lt;br&gt;- no side effects/health risks&lt;br&gt;- free</td>
<td>- may experience difficulty resisting pressure to have sexual contact&lt;br&gt;- requires self-discipline</td>
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<td>Fertility awareness</td>
<td>This refers to a woman’s recognition of the fertile days of her cycle. This can be done by measuring body temperature, charting mucus changes, or the calendar method. Detailed discussion with a healthcare provider can help define these techniques.</td>
<td>- no health risks/side effects&lt;br&gt;- very low cost&lt;br&gt;- helps a woman understand her body better</td>
<td>- typically, only 75% effective against pregnancy&lt;br&gt;- difficult for women with irregular cycles</td>
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<td><strong>Hormonal Methods:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Depo-Provera</td>
<td>Depo-Provera is an intramuscular shot of hormones given once every three months. It acts by stopping ovulation and thickening cervical mucus, making it harder for sperm to travel into the uterus. A prescription is required to get this medicine.</td>
<td>- 91-99+% effective against pregnancy&lt;br&gt;- easy to use&lt;br&gt;- does not interfere with sex&lt;br&gt;- may decrease menstrual cramps, bleeding, and PMS</td>
<td>- no protection from STIs&lt;br&gt;- requires shot (provider visit) every 3 months&lt;br&gt;- may take several months to leave system after stopping&lt;br&gt;- long term use can decrease bone density (calcium supplements recommended)&lt;br&gt;- possible side effects of weight gain, depression, headaches, or dizziness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth control pills</td>
<td>Birth control pills (BCPs) release hormones that halt ovulation, as well as thicken cervical mucus making it hard for sperm to get into the uterus. There are many different pills that vary with regard to the hormone(s) they contain and the length of time they allow between cycles. BCPs must be taken at the same time every day to be optimally effective. A prescription is required.</td>
<td>- 91-99+% effective&lt;br&gt;- easy to use&lt;br&gt;- does not interfere with sex&lt;br&gt;- may lighten periods and make them more regular&lt;br&gt;- may decrease menstrual cramps</td>
<td>- no protection from STIs&lt;br&gt;- must remember to take the pill at the same time every day&lt;br&gt;- health side effects: very small chance of blood clots, heart attacks, strokes, HBP (esp. if smoker)&lt;br&gt;- may cause weight gain, spotting, headaches, nausea, depression, or moodiness&lt;br&gt;- most side effects go away or lessen after 3 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vaginal ring</td>
<td>This is a soft flexible ring that a woman inserts in her vagina for three weeks, then removes it for the fourth week during which she has her menstrual period. The ring releases hormones that halt ovulation and thickens cervical mucus. A prescription is required to get this medicine.</td>
<td>- 91-99+% effective&lt;br&gt;- easy to use&lt;br&gt;- does not interfere with sex&lt;br&gt;- lightens menstrual periods and cramps&lt;br&gt;- helps prevent ovarian and endometrial cancer</td>
<td>- no protection from STIs&lt;br&gt;- must be worn whether having sex or not&lt;br&gt;- health side effects: very small chance of blood clots, heart attack, stroke, and HBP (esp. if smoker)&lt;br&gt;- may cause weight gain, spotting, headaches, nausea, depression, moodiness, blurred vision, oily skin, or breast tenderness&lt;br&gt;- most side effects go away or lessen after 3 months</td>
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</table>
### Birth control patch

The birth control patch is a thin plastic square that is applied to the skin and works much like BCPs, releasing hormones that stop ovulation. The patch stays in place for 3 weeks, then is removed for the 4th week when menstruation takes place. A prescription is required to get the patch.

- 91-99% effective
- easy to use
- does not interfere with sex
- lightens menstrual periods and cramps
- must be worn whether having sex or not
- health side effects: very small chance of blood clots, heart attack, stroke, and HBP (esp. if smoker)
- may cause weight gain, spotting, headaches, nausea, depression, or moodiness
- reports of blurred vision, oily skin, and breast tenderness
- most side effects go away or lessen after 3 months

### Long-acting reversible:

#### IUD

There are two types of intrauterine devices (IUDs), hormonal and copper. IUDs are small, T-shaped devices that are placed inside the uterus, and work to prevent sperm from reaching the uterus. The copper IUD can stay in place 10 years. The hormonal IUD releases a small amount of hormone daily and can stay in place 3-5 years. IUDs must be inserted and removed by a health care provider.

- 99+% effective
- always in place
- does not interfere with sex
- hormonal IUD may cause light/no periods
- can be removed at any time by health care provider
- may cause menstrual changes or spotting between periods
- copper IUD may cause increased menstrual bleeding/cramping
- must be removed by health care provider
- no protection from STIs
- may be awkward to insert
- may be distracting/noisy during intercourse
- must be used properly for

#### Implant

An implant is a tiny plastic rod that a health care provider inserts just under the skin, usually on the inner upper arm. It releases progestin, a hormone, which stops ovulation and thickens cervical mucus. The implant lasts for 3 years.

- 99+% effective
- always in place, does not interfere with sex
- can be removed by a health care provider at any time
- no protection from STIs
- may cause spotting, lighter periods, longer periods, or no period at all
- may cause spotting, lighter periods, longer periods, or no period at all

### Barrier Methods:

#### Diaphragm

A diaphragm is a small, flexible latex or silicone cup that is placed over the cervix providing a block so sperm cannot get into the uterus. It can be inserted up to 6 hours prior to intercourse, and must be left in place 6 hours after. Spermicide is usually coated on the cup, and if intercourse is repeated, spermicide can be reapplied. A woman must be fitted for a diaphragm by a health care provider.

- 88-94% effective
- can be inserted 6 hours prior to sex so will not interrupt
- only used when needed
- latex or spermicides can cause irritation or allergic reaction
- some experience difficulty with insertion/removal
- messy
- must be left in place for 6 hours after intercourse

#### Male condom

A male condom fits over an erect penis and serves to prevent sperm from entering the vagina. If used properly, they help prevent the transfer of bodily fluids. Latex and plastic condoms protect against STIs, but are not 100%. Condoms cannot be re-used, a new one must be used each time.

- 82-98% effective
- reduces the risk for STIs
- readily available
- easy to use/carry
- used only when needed
- can be used with other birth control methods as additional protection
- no prescription needed
- single use only, must use a new condom with every episode of intercourse
- must be used properly for optimal effectiveness
- may interrupt sex
- must plan ahead, make sure condoms are available

#### Female condom

The female condom is inserted into the vagina during sex, and prevents sperm from entering the vagina. They also reduce exchange of bodily fluids, thus

- 79-95% effective
- reduces the risk for STIs
- readily available
- easy to use/carry
- may be awkward to insert
- may be distracting/noisy during intercourse
- must be used properly for
Reducing the risk for STIs. They cannot be used with a male condom as they will both break.

- Used only when needed
- Is not dependent on a male being erect to stay in place

**Effectiveness**
- Must plan ahead, make sure it’s available when needed

### Other:

| Spermicides | Spermicides are creams, films, foams, gels, or suppositories that contain chemicals that kill sperm. A woman inserts spermicides into her vagina prior to sex, and can be used alone or with other methods of birth control. They are available at most drug stores. | · 72-82% effective when used alone · Readily available without a prescription · Easy to use/carry · Used only when needed | · No protection for STIs · May interrupt sex to insert right before intercourse · Can be messy · May cause irritation to either partner |
| Emergency contraception | Emergency contraception is used after unprotected sex. In most cases, it is a morning after pill (MAP) that contains hormones that prevent ovulation or implantation. It must be used within a few days. Some MAPs are available without a prescription. There is also an IUD (ParaGard IUD) available as emergency contraception, and must be inserted by a health care provider. | · 98% effective if used properly (3-5 days after unprotected sex) · Some MAPs are available without a prescription | · No protection from STIs · Side effects: feeling sick/dizzy, headaches, or breast soreness |