

Birth Control



By Ashleigh Eisbrener

In the United States, about 98 percent of women who have ever had sexual intercourse have used at least one method of birth control, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). On average, women remain fertile up until they're 40 years old, when their fertility significantly drops off. If at any time during these prime years you choose to not have children and don't practice abstinence, the safest and best choice, you will be obligated to choose a form of birth control that best suits your lifestyle. Your decision between a number of barriers and hormonal contraceptives will be based on many factors, such as effectiveness, benefits and disadvantages, protection against STDs and religious views. We've put together a birth control guide to help prepare you for making the best choice for you and your partner.

BARRIER METHODS

Male Condom

A thin latex, plastic or animal membrane covering that's rolled over the male sex organ, providing a barrier between the sperm and egg.

Effectiveness: 15 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Quick, simple and protection against STDs.

Disadvantages: Can cause irritation, slip or break.

Cost: \$1 each.

Female Condom

A plastic pouch inserted into the vagina before intercourse that provides a barrier between the sperm and egg. It has two flexible rings: one that holds the pouch in place and one that remains outside the vagina.

Effectiveness: 21 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Easily accessible and provides protection against STDs.

Disadvantages: Can cause irritation, slip or make noise.

Cost: \$3 each.

Cervical Cap

A silicone cup used with spermicide, that's placed over the cervix to prevent the sperm from coming in contact with the egg.

Effectiveness: 14 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Discrete, doesn't affect your hormones, can be inserted up to six hours in advance, is reusable and can be used during breastfeeding.

Disadvantages: Can be difficult to insert, may fall out of place and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$72 per year plus a \$50-\$200 doctor's visit for fitting.

Diaphragm

A shallow, dome-shaped cup with a flexible rim that's inserted into the vagina to cover the cervix and block the opening of the uterus.

Effectiveness: 16 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Discrete, doesn't affect your hormones, can be inserted up to six hours in advance, is reusable and can be used during breastfeeding.

Disadvantages: Can be difficult to insert, may fall out of place and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$30-\$50 per year plus a \$50-\$200 doctor's visit for fitting.

Birth Control Sponge

A soft, round two-inch plastic foam covered in spermicide that's inserted into the vagina to cover the cervix and block the opening of the uterus.

Effectiveness: 16 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Discrete, doesn't affect your hormones, can be used during breastfeeding and can be worn up to 30 hours.

Disadvantages: Can be difficult to insert, may fall out of place and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$2.50 each.

HORMONAL CONTRACEPTIVES

Birth Control Pill

A pill made of estrogen and/or progestin taken daily to keep the ovaries from releasing eggs.

Effectiveness: 8 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Reduces cramps and lightens periods.

Disadvantages: Must be taken daily and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$9-\$60 per month plus a \$35-\$175 doctor's visit.

Birth Control Patch

A thin, beige, plastic patch that placed on the skin once a week for three consecutive weeks that releases estrogen and progestin into the body to keep the ovaries from releasing eggs.

Effectiveness: 2 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Reduces menstrual cramps and lightens periods.

Disadvantages: Possible spotting, skin irritation and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$50 per month plus \$35-\$175 doctor's visit.

The Vaginal Ring

A small, flexible ring, inserted into the vagina once a month, that releases estrogen and progestin, keeping a woman's ovaries from releasing eggs.

Effectiveness: 8 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Regular, lighter periods.

Disadvantages: Possible spotting and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$35-\$50 per month and \$35-\$175 doctor's visit.

Birth Control Shot

An injection of the hormone progestin given to prevent pregnancy for three months.

Effectiveness: 3 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Safe and simple, provides long-lasting pregnancy protection and can be used while breastfeeding.

Disadvantages: Possibility of irregular periods, skin irritation and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: \$30-\$75 every three months, plus \$35-\$125 initial doctor's visit, plus \$20-\$40 regular office visits.

Birth Control Implant

A match-sized rod inserted just under the skin of the upper arm by a health care provider that releases progestin into the body, keeping the ovaries from releasing eggs.

Effectiveness: Less than 1 out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Safe, simple and can be used while breast feeding.

Disadvantages: Possible spotting between periods.

Cost: \$400-\$800 every three years.

Intrauterine Device (IUD)

A small, T-shaped device that's inserted into a woman's uterus by a health care provider. Two types: a copper IUD, effective for 10 years and a hormonal IUD, effective for five years.

Effectiveness: Less than one out of 100 women a year will become pregnant (Mayo Clinic).

Benefits: Reduces cramps, lightens periods and can be used while breast feeding.

Disadvantages: Possible spotting and doesn't protect against STDs.

Cost: Copper IUD~ \$200-\$300 every 10 years plus office visit cost, Hormonal IUD~ \$300-\$400 every five years plus office visit cost.