

IUD (IntraUterine Device)

by Frank E. Trogolo, M.D.

The intrauterine device (IUD) is a form of birth control that is inserted in the uterus and left in place to prevent pregnancy. There are 4 IUD's approved for use in the USA, three with hormones (Mirena, Skyla, and Liletta) and one with copper (ParaGard). They are T-shaped, >99% effective, easily reversible and well tolerated. They have a specific time of use for each, 5 years for the Mirena, 3 years for the Skyla and Liletta, and 10 years for the ParaGard, if pregnancy is desired before that time then the IUD can be removed at any time. As soon as the IUD is removed it no longer protects against pregnancy. The IUD is more effective than other forms of birth control because you can't forget to use it. They are a very popular form of birth control in Europe but in the United States only about 2% of women use them.

How it works

The copper IUD releases a small amount of copper. This can prevent the sperm from reaching the egg and fertilizing it. It may also prevent the egg from attaching to the uterus.

The hormonal IUD releases a small amount of progestin. This thickens the cervical mucus which prevents the sperm from entering the uterus and fertilizing the egg, it may make sperm less active. It also thins the lining of the uterus which makes the egg less likely to implant and makes the menstrual periods a lot lighter. Some women may have no period at all.

How it is inserted

A healthcare provider has to insert the IUD. They will make sure that you are a candidate for the IUD. There are several women who are not candidates for an IUD, the healthcare provider will let you know if you are not able to have an IUD.

The IUD is usually inserted during or right after the menstrual period. The insertion doesn't usually require anesthesia, but taking an over the counter medication for pain before the procedure may help. Once the IUD is inserted there will be a string from the device in the vagina. This helps in the removal of the IUD.

Benefits

1. Easy to use- nothing to remember, once it is place, it is working
2. Most women and their partners don't feel anything different.
3. The hormonal IUD may help to make periods a lot lighter and less painful

Side Effects

Some women may experience worsening pain and bleeding with their cycles. Vaginal discharge can occur as well. For most women these symptoms are short lived and disappear after the first few months of use. The IUD doesn't prevent against sexually transmitted infections. Although pregnancy risk is very low with the IUD, if it does happen there is an increased risk of being an ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy that is not inside the uterus).

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