

# Understanding contraception: your options, your choice

## What is contraception?

Contraception (or birth control) helps prevent pregnancy. It works in different ways — some stop ovulation, others stop sperm reaching the egg. Condoms also protect against STIs.



## Types of contraception

- **Long-acting reversible contraception (LARC)** – you don't need to think about it every day.
- **Short-acting methods** – like the pill, which you take daily.

The best method for you depends on your body, lifestyle, and what feels right.

## Quick facts

- LARC methods are the most effective for preventing pregnancy.
- Condoms are the only method that also protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Emergency contraception is available if needed.
- All contraception services are free and confidential through the NHS.

## How to choose what's right for you

Consider:

- Your health and medical history
- Whether you want something long-term or more flexible
- Effectiveness and ease of use
- If you want lighter or more regular periods
- If you need STI protection
- Your plans for pregnancy in the future
- Any religious or cultural reasons for having regular bleeding

### When to seek medical help



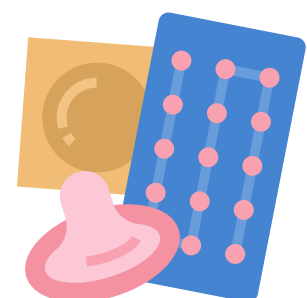
- If you need emergency contraception
- If you have symptoms of an STI
- If you're unsure which method is best for you

## Support and resources

Find out more about the different forms of contraception and find what's right for you by visiting these links:

- [www.contraceptionchoices.org](http://www.contraceptionchoices.org)
- [www.nhs.uk/contraception/](http://www.nhs.uk/contraception/)

Some pharmacies offer the pill without a GP appointment. Ask your local pharmacy or check the NHS website.



# Overview of contraception options

Type of Contraception	Effective	How it works	Duration	Pros	Cons
<b>Long-acting reversible contraception (LARC)</b>					
Intrauterine Device (IUD) - Copper Coil	Over 99%	Prevents fertilization by releasing copper	5-10 years	Hormone-free, long-lasting, effective as emergency contraception/ No need to remember daily contraception	Can cause heavier and more painful periods/ requires a short procedure that might feel uncomfortable
Levonorgestrel Intrauterine (LNG-IUD) – Hormonal Coil/ Intrauterine system (IUS)	Over 99%	Releases progestogen to thin the womb lining	3-8 years	Can reduce heavy periods, long-lasting/ No need to remember daily contraception	Requires a short procedure that might feel uncomfortable
Contraceptive Implant	Over 99%	Releases progestogen to stop ovulation	Up to 3 years	Highly effective and convenient.	Can cause irregular bleeding
Contraceptive Injection	99 % but drops to 94% if injection missed	Releases progestogen to stop ovulation	8-13 weeks	No daily routine; self-administered; may reduce periods	Possible weight gain, delayed return to fertility
<b>Short-acting contraception</b>					
Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill (“The Pill”)	Over 91%	Prevents ovulation	Daily	Can regulate periods, improve acne	Must be taken daily, slight risk of blood clots
Progestogen-Only Pill (Mini Pill)	Over 91%	Thickens cervical mucus/ Prevents ovulation	Daily	Suitable for those who cannot take oestrogen	Must be taken at the same time every day/ can cause irregular bleeding
Contraceptive Patch	Over 91%	Prevents ovulation	Weekly	Easy to use, regulates periods	May cause skin irritation/ only provided in one colour so it might not be discreet on some skin tones
Vaginal Ring	Over 91%	Prevent ovulation	Monthly	No daily pills, lighter periods	Can cause vaginal irritation/ can be inserted incorrectly

Type of Contraception	Effective	How it works	Duration	Pros	Cons
<b>Barrier methods (also protect against STIs)</b>					
Male Condom	98% (with correct use. 85% with incorrect use	Prevents sperm from entering the vagina	Single use	Protects against STIs & pregnancy/ hormone free	Can split or be used incorrectly
Female Condom	95% with correct use. 85% with incorrect use	Prevents sperm from entering the vagina	Single use	Protects against STIs & pregnancy/ hormone free	Less widely available/ can be used incorrectly
Diaphragm & Cervical Cap	92-96% with spermicide 88% with incorrect use	Covers the cervix to block sperm	Reusable	Hormone-free, inserted before sex	Must be used with spermicide; not reliable for STI protection; must remain in place for 6 hours after sex
<b>Permanent contraception</b>					
Male Sterilisation (Vasectomy)	Over 99%	Blocks sperm from reaching semen	Permanent	No long-term hormone side effects	Irreversible in most cases
Female Sterilisation	Over 99%	Clips, cuts or ties fallopian tubes	Permanent	No long-term hormone side effects	Irreversible in most cases
<b>Emergency contraception</b>					
Emergency IUD (Copper Coil)	Over 99%	Prevents implantation	Up to 5 days after sex, can be used outside of this time with medical advice	Most effective emergency contraception, in some cases can work after the ovulation (day 19 of a regular 28 day cycle)	Requires a fitting procedure
Emergency Contraceptive Pill ("Morning After Pill")	Up to 95% if taken quickly	Delays ovulation	One-time use, as soon as possible after sex	Can be taken up to 5 days after sex	Less effective if taken later and ineffective after ovulation (typically day 14 of a 28-day cycle)
<b>Natural methods</b>					
Fertility Awareness	76%	Tracking ovulation	Ongoing	Hormone-free, increases body awareness	Less reliable, needs consistent tracking
Withdrawal Method	78%	Pulling out before ejaculation	Each time	Hormone- free	Less reliable