

When health care providers and women talk about contraception (birth control), it may feel like they are only talking about birth control pills, often just called “the pill.”

However, there are many types of birth control you can use to prevent pregnancy. You should pick a birth control method that you feel best suits your life.

One birth control method that doesn’t get talked about much is intrauterine contraception, also called an intrauterine device (IUD).

What is Intrauterine Contraception?

When you decide to use intrauterine contraception, an intrauterine device (IUD) is inserted by your health care provider (doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) into your uterus, also called your womb. IUDs are shaped like a “T” and have short, thin strings that hang down from your uterus into the top of your vagina. These strings can’t be seen from the outside of your body and can’t be felt during sex. Two IUDs are available in the US: one contains copper (ParaGard®) and the other contains the hormone levonorgestrel (Mirena®). ParaGard is effective for at least ten years. Mirena is effective for at least five years.

There are many reasons why an IUD is a good birth control method. IUDs:

- are safe and effective (help you NOT to get pregnant)
- require little or no hassle to use
- can easily be removed from your uterus when and if you want to become pregnant

Why Do Myths about Intrauterine Contraception Exist?

For all these reasons, more and more women are using IUDs. However, you may have heard myths from the news, health care providers, or from other women that have scared you away from using an IUD. Many myths about IUDs come from problems with IUDs that were used more than 25 years ago. You should know that IUDs available today are not the same as the ones used many years ago.

Today’s IUDs

Today’s IUDs:

- are safe
- are effective (99 women out of 100 will not get pregnant when using an IUD)
- have been tested by researchers
- do NOT have the same dangers or problems as some did in the 1970s

Both the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association consider IUDs to be a good type of birth control because they are safe, effective, and reversible.

Here Are Some of the Facts about IUDs

IUDs do not cause abortion.

IUDs prevent pregnancy. Both ParaGard and Mirena work by keeping a woman's egg and a man's sperm from meeting. With ParaGard, copper keeps sperm from reaching the uterus where it can fertilize an egg. The hormone in Mirena thickens mucus in your cervix to prevent sperm from reaching the uterus.

IUDs do not increase the risk of ectopic pregnancy.

An ectopic pregnancy happens when a fertilized egg implants in a place other than the uterus, like your fallopian tubes. An ectopic pregnancy can be life threatening and can cause a woman to die. Women who use IUDs are NOT more likely to have an ectopic pregnancy than women who use other types of birth control.

IUDs do not cause infertility and do not hurt your chances of getting pregnant later.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) can cause a pelvic infection or Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). Without treatment, these conditions can cause infertility (when you are unable to have a baby). Having an IUD at any point does not cause infertility.

IUDs are fine for women who haven't had children yet.

The World Health Organization has said that for women who have never had a baby, the benefits of IUDs are greater than any of the risks.

Women who have had an ectopic pregnancy in the past can use an IUD.

If a woman decides to get an IUD, a past ectopic pregnancy will not increase her risk of having

more problems later. If a woman develops a pelvic infection or PID while she has an IUD, she does not need to have the IUD removed right away.

Women who use an IUD and develop an STI or PID should be tested and treated right away.

However, their IUD does not need to be taken out unless their symptoms do not get better after 72 hours (3 days).

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. A Clinical Update on Intrauterine Contraception. <http://www.arhp.org/core>

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. A Woman's Guide to Understanding IUDs. www.arhp.org/patienteducation/onlinebrochures/understandingIUDs.cfm

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