

LEVONORGESTREL IMPLANTS (NORPLANT SYSTEM)

The Norplant System (a registered trademark of the Population Council) consists of small flexible tubes containing progesterone, similar to what your body produces. The hormone is then released onto your body in small amounts, preventing the release of eggs from the ovaries. Six soft flexible Silastic capsules are placed in a fan-like pattern under the skin of the upper arm. Silastic material has been used in medicine for over 40 years. The implants also thicken the cervical mucus, which makes it more difficult for the sperm to reach the egg.

Placing the implants is an office procedure that usually takes 10–15 minutes. After careful counseling with your health care provider, the capsules are placed through a small incision. A local anesthetic is used, so there should be little or no discomfort during the procedure.

Effectiveness

The Norplant System is among the most effective contraceptives available, around 99%. The Norplant System is effective within 24 hours if placed within the 7 days after the onset of menstrual bleeding or immediately after an abortion. If placed during other times, a backup method must be used for the remainder of your cycle.

Appearance

Once placed, the capsules usually cannot be seen unless the woman is very thin or muscular. The outline of the capsules under the skin can be felt. The capsules will not break or move around once in place.

Placement of the Norplant System leaves a very small scar on the arm, which is not noticeable in most women. In some women, discoloration occurs over the placement site, but it usually disappears when the capsules are removed.

The most common side effect is irregular menstrual bleeding, which tends to lessen after 9–12 months. These irregularities vary from woman to woman. As with any drug, serious and minor side effects may occur. These should be discussed with your health care provider. Notify your health care provider immediately if you experience any of the following:

- A heavier period than normal
- A prolonged period
- A missed period after you have had regular periods while using the implants
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe headaches
- Blurred vision
- Redness, swelling, pain, or bleeding at the insertion site
- Pain in the arm or hand after the insertion site has healed

Who Can Use It?

The Norplant System offers convenience, comfort, reversibility, and long-term effectiveness. It may be a particularly good option for a woman who:

- is considering sterilization, but is not ready to make a final decision
- wants to avoid daily contraceptive use or coitus-related contraceptive methods
- wants long-term, reversible contraception
- does not wish to use an estrogen-containing contraceptive

Women who are pregnant or think they may be pregnant should **not** have the capsules placed. They can be safely used after childbirth and while breastfeeding, however. Also, women who have the following should not use the Norplant System:

- Acute liver disease; noncancerous or cancerous liver tumors
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding (until a diagnosis is reached by your health care provider)
- Breast cancer—known or suspected
- High blood pressure, gallbladder disease, or elevated cholesterol levels
- Blood clots in the arms or legs (thrombophlebitis), lungs (pulmonary embolism), eyes, or any other part of the body

Removal

The capsules are effective for 5 years. After 5 years (or earlier if you desire), return to your health care provider to have the capsules removed. Fertility returns immediately on removal of the implants. Removal is a similar procedure to placement and takes place in the health care provider's office. The procedure usually takes 15–20 minutes. If desired, another set of capsules may be placed at the same time the old set is removed.

Pregnancy

As soon as the capsules are removed, and you will quickly return to your previous level of fertility. Once the capsules are removed, you are no longer protected from pregnancy.

As with any birth control option, the NORPLANT SYSTEM may not be the right choice for every woman, because individual needs vary greatly among women using contraception. Each woman who considers using the NORPLANT SYSTEM should understand the benefits and risks of this option. You should discuss this information with your health care provider when deciding whether the NORPLANT SYSTEM is the best birth control option for you.