

PREGNANCY PREVENTION—FOR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

If you are thinking about having sex for the first time or you already are sexually active, you probably want to know about preventing an **unplanned pregnancy**. Most methods of birth control depend on the girl to do or take something, but only the male method of birth control, condoms, can also prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Having Sex

No methods of birth control are 100% effective. Only abstinence involves no risk of pregnancy. However, correctly using one of the birth control methods described can make the risk quite small.

Many sexual activities are almost always safe without having to take any special precautions. These include holding hands, hugging, touching, and kissing. Still, some teens decide to also have sexual intercourse. Having sex can be a very loving and special experience between two people. However, you should think about several important issues before you decide to have sex. Sex always involves the potential for giving you a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or making you pregnant. You also can get hurt emotionally, because sex involves such strong feelings between two people.

Decide ahead of time what is right for you. Find an adult whom you trust and with whom you can discuss your feelings and opinions, and ask questions. Some teens feel that they can discuss sexual issues with their parents, even though it is sometimes awkward to start the conversation. Others may wish to talk with ministers or rabbis at their church or synagogue, school counselors or teachers, or adult relatives. Your doctor's office also can help you. You can usually ask questions confidentially.

Common Birth Control Methods

In addition to using a condom each time they have sex, many young women and their male partners want additional protection from pregnancy. If used correctly, condoms prevent pregnancy 85% of the time. The condom is very effective at preventing STDs, but there are more effective methods for preventing pregnancy.

The three hormonal birth control methods are "birth control pills," "Depo" shots, and "Norplant" surgical implants. These methods use female hormones to stop ovulation (the female egg does not leave the ovary, so fertilization with the male sperm can't occur), or they also make the mucus that is at the opening of a women's cervix thick, so that male sperm can't travel through the cervix and get to the female egg. They prevent pregnancy 99% of the time. "Birth control pills" must be taken once every day. While on the Pill, you know exactly when you are going to get your period, and usually the period is lighter, shorter, and has less cramping

than before “the Pill.” All medicines have side effects; please talk with your health care provider before beginning to take birth control pills. Most girls on the “Pill” have no problems at all. If you do develop a problem, usually your prescription can be switched to a slightly different one by your doctor, and that is all that is needed.

“Depo” shots (or Depo-Provera) are injections of female hormones given every 3 months in the arm or buttocks of a young woman. You don’t have to think about taking a pill every day, and you are protected from pregnancy for 3 months, until you get the next shot. Usually the shot area is not sore. Most girls using “Depo” experience irregular periods.

“Norplant” surgical implants are female hormones contained in small, soft capsules that are placed just underneath your skin on the inside of your upper arm. Because the capsules are thin and underneath the skin, they usually can’t be seen. The capsules are inserted in the doctor’s office. Norplant protects a girl from getting pregnant for 5 years. After 5 years, the capsules are removed (also in the doctor’s office), and the young woman then decides whether to have new ones put in or change to a different method or birth control. If you have any problems with the capsules or you plan to get pregnant, you can have them taken out before 5 years. Just like with the “Depo” shots, you probably will have irregular periods.

The “Morning-After” Pill

Emergency contraception is also known as the “morning-after pill.” This type of birth control is sometimes used in an emergency, that is, when two people who always use condoms find out after the guy ejaculates or “comes” that the condom has broken. Or someone who isn’t yet taking birth control unexpectedly has sex and doesn’t use a condom.

Emergency contraception cannot prevent all pregnancies, but it works in most cases. However, you must call the doctor’s office less than 72 hours (less than 3 days) from the time you have unprotected sex, and the sooner the better. If you have sex without any birth control on a Friday and can’t reach your doctor over the weekend, call first thing on Monday morning. It might be helpful to tell an adult you trust that you are worried about being pregnant and what happened. The doctor will give you a few special hormone pills to take right away, and some others to take 12 hours later. Then you can decide what birth control method will work best for you in the future.

Using Condoms

- Pinch the condom at the tip to squeeze out the air. Do not unroll the condom before placing it on the penis.
- Roll the condom all the way down the erect (hard) penis. (Don’t try to put a condom on a soft penis).
- After sex, hold onto the condom while the penis is being pulled out.
 - Use of spermicidal jelly or foam (available in the drug store without a prescription) inside the vagina helps make the condom method even better at preventing pregnancy. The jelly

can kill sperm, but it doesn't work if used without a condom.

—Never re-use the same condom. It is a good idea to have two available in case one breaks.

—If a condom breaks, as soon as you realize it, take it off and put another one on or stop having sexual intercourse until you can get another condom.

—The man should pull out of his sexual partner while the penis is still hard. If his penis gets soft first, the sperm can leak around the condom.

—Condoms are sold in drug stores. Buy latex rubber or plastic condoms. Never use condoms made from animal skins; they can leak.

—After use, wrap the condom in a tissue and throw it in the trash. Do not flush condoms, because they may cause sewer problems.

—If you use a lubricant with condoms, make sure it is water-based (like K-Y jelly). Do not use Vaseline or Crisco; these can cause the condom to break.

—Some condoms are lubricated with a chemical, Nonoxynol-9, that helps kill some of the germs that cause STDs. Others are dry condoms. It doesn't matter which one you use, as long as you use a condom every time you have sex.

A **female condom**, one that lines a woman's vagina, is available, but it is more difficult to use. You should talk with a doctor or nurse before you try it.

Other Information About Preventing Pregnancy

- The **“withdrawal” method**, in which the guy pulls his penis out of the vagina before he ejaculates or “comes,” is not a good method of preventing pregnancy. It is very difficult to pull out exactly at the right time, and some sperm leaks out anyway. However, if you are having sex without a condom and the girl isn't on any birth control, it is better to withdraw before ejaculating.
- The **“rhythm” method**, in which a couple only have sexual intercourse during certain times of a girl's menstrual cycle when she is not as likely to get pregnant, is also not a very reliable method. This method is mostly used by married couples. It is difficult to learn.

Call Our Office If:

- You are more than a week late for your period.
- You have questions about sex.
- You know the condom broke or you didn't use one and the female partner isn't on birth control methods.
- You think you might need emergency contraception (the “morning-after” pill).

Written by J. Todd Jacobs, MD, Oakland, CA. Copyright © 1997.