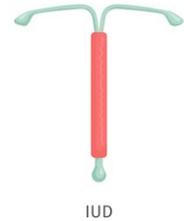


How do IUDs work & are they safe?

One of the best forms of birth control are intrauterine devices, or IUDs. They are a long-acting option that can remain in place for years. If you're thinking about getting an IUD, here are answers to six common questions about them.



Six questions to ask before you get an IUD

1. What are IUDs?

- IUDs are small, flexible, T-shaped devices that sit in your uterus to prevent pregnancies.
- There are five FDA-approved brands in the United States: ParaGard, Liletta, Mirena, Skylar and Kyleena. ParaGard is the only non-hormonal IUD. It is wrapped in copper, which is toxic to sperm. The other IUDs have hormones in them that prevent pregnancy.
- The copper IUD protects against pregnancy immediately after insertion. The hormonal IUDs only prevent pregnancies right away if they're inserted during the first seven days of your menstrual cycle. Otherwise, it takes one week before they're effective.
- Although IUDs can remain in place for years, they can also be removed at any time. You will quickly become fertile again after removal. This makes them a great option for women who want to prevent pregnancy right now, but may want to have a child in the future.

2. How do IUDs work?

- Copper IUDs release small amounts of copper, which is a natural spermicide. Hormonal IUDs thicken cervical mucus to block and trap sperm, as well as prevent eggs from leaving your ovaries.
- IUDs are one of the best methods of birth control. They have a failure rate of less than one percent. But birth control pills fail nine percent of the time and condoms fail 21 percent of the time.

3. Does it hurt to get an IUD?

- The process to put in an IUD begins like a pelvic exam. A speculum, the metal instrument used during a pelvic exam, is inserted into your vagina. This opens your vagina to allow access to your cervix. A small tube with the IUD in it is inserted through your cervix. The IUD arms are bent back in the tube and open once it's in your uterus. The process usually takes less than five minutes.
- Most women feel cramping or mild discomfort during insertion. If pain is felt, it usually only lasts a moment. After the IUD is inserted, some women also feel dizzy or faint. Taking an ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) before your appointment can help. Making your appointment during the last days of your period, when your cervix is naturally open, can also reduce discomfort.

4. Will I still get my period if I have an IUD?

- Most women have some cramping and spotting with IUDs, but this goes away within three to six months.
- Hormonal IUDs make periods lighter and reduce cramps. Some women's periods disappear altogether.
- Copper IUDs can make periods heavier and cramps worse, but this usually goes away over time.

5. How soon after childbirth can I get an IUD?

- You can get an IUD immediately after childbirth. But most doctors wait six weeks, because insertion after labor requires a different technique.

6. I've been told IUDs are unsafe. Is this true?

- In the 1970s, an IUD called Dalkon Shield was linked to pelvic infection that caused infertility and death. That IUD had multiple flaws, including a design that allowed bacteria to get into the uterus and made it difficult to insert. This caused IUD failures and pregnancies. Doctors and manufacturers also didn't fully understand how they worked or how to safely insert or remove them.
- According to Dr. Erica Berven, an ObGyn physician at the Park Nicollet Women's Center, the IUDs offered today are much safer and created to reduce infections. "Risks are small but I do like patients to know what to expect. Irregular cramping and bleeding are common, but usually resolve in four to eight weeks. More rare complications include malposition or perforation. Malposition means the IUD has an abnormal position in the uterus. Perforation is when the IUD passes through the wall of the uterus in the abdominal cavity. Care with placement helps avoid these issues. If there are concerns, an ultrasound can help reassure us of the location."

Who should not get an IUD

Most people can get an IUD safely. But you shouldn't get an IUD if you:

- Have or might have an STD or other infection
- Think you might be pregnant
- Have cervical cancer that hasn't been treated
- Have cancer of the uterus
- Have vaginal bleeding that's not your period
- Have an allergy to copper, Wilson's Disease or a bleeding disorder (for ParaGard only)

"IUDs are a great form of birth control," said Dr. Berven. "They are highly effective because they limit the chances of mistakes. You don't need to remember to swallow a pill and you can't use it incorrectly."

For more information on IUDs or to have one implanted, schedule an appointment at [Park Nicollet Women's Center](#) or any of their nine clinic locations.