

What is it?

The IUD is a small, T-shaped piece of flexible plastic (about the size of a quarter) that fits inside a woman's uterus to prevent pregnancy. The modern IUD releases either copper or progestin (a hormone found in birth control pills) to make it more effective.

FACT: The IUD is the world's most popular method of reversible birth control.

Getting Started with the IUD

To get the most positive, worry-free start with your IUD, take some time to learn about it now:

- A trained health provider will insert your IUD during a clinic visit. The insertion only takes a few minutes, and you can get it done at any time during your menstrual cycle.
- For the first 5 – 7 days after insertion, avoid putting anything in your vagina (no penis, no fingers, no tampons).
- Call the clinic if you have a fever, or if you notice unusual pain or bleeding from your vagina.
- It's important to return to the clinic about 4 - 6 weeks after insertion for a follow up visit.
- Check the IUD string **every week** for the first few months
- After the first few months, get into the habit of checking the IUD string about **once a month**, or after each period.
- If your IUD is inserted during your period, you will have **immediate** protection against pregnancy. If you get your IUD inserted at another time, use a back-up method like condoms for 7 days.

How to Make Your IUD Insertion More Comfortable:

Most women feel some cramping (like heavy period cramps) during and a little after their IUD insertion. Here are some simple things you can do to make your insertion more comfortable:

- Take some aspirin or ibuprofen about an hour **before** your appointment to help with cramping.
- During the insertion, take deep, slow breaths. Breathing deeply will help you feel more relaxed.
- After the insertion, give yourself time to rest at home until you feel more comfortable.
- If you feel pain after the insertion, tell your health provider **before** you leave the clinic.

How to Check the String

Your IUD has 2 plastic strings attached to it. These strings help you make sure your IUD is in place, and they also help your provider remove the IUD. Follow these simple steps to check your strings. Once you get the hang of it, it will only take a minute!

- Stand, sit or squat like you would to insert a tampon.
- Slide your finger into your vagina, deep enough to touch the back of your vagina.
- Gently move your finger to feel for the strings. If you can feel the strings, that means your IUD is in place.
- If the strings feel shorter or longer than the last time you checked, you cannot feel them, or you feel the plastic frame of the IUD, call the clinic **immediately**, and use a backup method of birth control.

“I like the freedom of the IUD. It's birth control you don't have to remember to take every day, and it's good for five to ten years!

— Sherry, age 27
mother of 2

What to Expect: Common Side Effects

There are 2 different types of IUDs available in the U.S. today: the copper IUD (brand name: Paraguard) and the progestin IUD (brand name: Mirena). The side effects you have will depend on which IUD you choose.

Changes in Your Period

The copper IUD **does not** contain hormones. Some women choose it because they don't want to deal with hormonal side effects (like with the Pill or Depo), or because they want to keep having a regular monthly period. With the copper IUD, you will probably notice that your periods are:

- regular (they come every month)
- a few days longer and heavier than usual

The progestin IUD **does** contain a hormone (the same one found in many birth control pills). Some women choose the progestin IUD because they want lighter periods, or because they like the idea of their periods coming **less often**. With the progestin IUD:

- During the first 3- 6 months, bleeding between periods and cramping are common.
- By 1 year, periods are shorter, lighter, and less painful.
- After 1 year, one in five women have no period!
- After removing the progestin IUD, periods return to what they were before it was inserted.

Other Side Effects (progestin IUD only)

Because the progestin IUD releases a hormone, some women may also notice side effects like:

- moodiness
- headaches
- skin changes

Benefits of Using the IUD

More and more women are choosing IUDs because they are safe, easy, and effective. Here are some of the reasons why women today choose the IUD:

- Very effective (more effective than the Pill)
- Long lasting: 5 years with progestin IUD, 10 years with copper IUD
- Easy to use: nothing to do but check the strings once a month!
- Good option for women who have already had at least one child
- Can use while breastfeeding

FACT: The IUD is one of the most effective long-term birth control methods available today!

Some Disadvantages: What You Should Know

While the IUD is a choice for some women, it isn't the best fit for everyone. The list below will help you to understand why the IUD may not be the best choice for some women:

- The IUD does **not** protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STDs). You need to use a **condom** if you think you need protection.
- You need to go to a trained health provider to get the IUD inserted, and the insertion can be uncomfortable for some women.
- You need to feel comfortable touching your vagina to check the strings once a month.

What to Do if You Have a Problem

Serious problems with the IUD are **very rare**. The most serious problem is the possibility of an infection in your uterus. Infections usually start with warning signs. Know these signs, and contact your health provider, clinic, or emergency room if you have any of the following:

- severe pain or cramps in your belly
- deep pain when having sex
- fever or chills
- bad smelling fluid from your vagina
- very heavy bleeding from your vagina

Effectiveness

The IUD is **over 99%** effective when used correctly. If 100 women used the IUD correctly for a year, only 1 of them would get pregnant.

REMEMBER: using the IUD correctly means checking the strings once a month, every month, to make sure your IUD is in place.

IUD Removal

Your IUD is made to last a long time (5 years with the progestin IUD and 10 years with the copper IUD), but you can **always** have it removed sooner if you want. IUD removal is done in the clinic by a trained health provider, and only takes a few minutes. Most women find that the removal is less painful than insertion.

Pregnancy and the IUD

Once you get your IUD removed, your ability to get pregnant returns immediately. If you know you don't want to be pregnant, start using another birth control method! If you want to get pregnant, start taking vitamins with folic acid – it's one of the best things you can do for your future child.

Common Questions

Will I feel the IUD?

No. Once your IUD is inserted, you won't feel it at all. Your partner may feel the strings during sex, but this is not common, and it doesn't hurt you or your partner. If you think your strings are too long, you can ask your health provider to cut the strings shorter.

Can the IUD fall out?

A very small number — only about 3% — of all IUDs come out on their own. This is called “expulsion”, and though it sounds scary, it doesn't hurt. Expulsion is most likely to happen during the first few months with an IUD. That's why it's so important to check your strings regularly! If it happens, call the clinic, and use a back up method like condoms.

What if I get pregnant while using the IUD?

If you think you might be pregnant, contact your clinic or health provider right away! Most pregnancies happen because the IUD falls out and women don't notice it. Very rarely, a pregnancy can happen while the IUD is still in place. If this happens, there is a greater chance of miscarriage and also an increased chance that the pregnancy will be ectopic (tubal). So, the sooner the IUD is removed, the better chance for a safe pregnancy.

Can I use tampons with an IUD?

Yes! Tampons won't pull out the IUD, or cause it to move. You can safely use them.

FACT: Most women will become pregnant within a year of removing their IUD if they don't use any other birth control.

To learn more about other reversible birth control methods:

Check out our brochures on:

The Pill
Depo Provera (“The Shot”)
Emergency Contraception (“EC”)
Condoms
The Patch
The Ring

Check out our website at:

www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan

To find a Family Planning Provider near you:

Call the Family Planning Hotline
1-800-770-4334 **OR** TTY 1-800-848-5429
For confidential information and referrals

To prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or after your birth control method fails:

Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline:
1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)
or check out the Emergency Contraception website:
www.not-2-late.com to find a clinic or pharmacy near you.



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