

BIRTH CONTROL

There are different forms of birth control. Below is an overview of some existing methods that you can use. These methods are: **natural family planning, birth control pill, birth control injection, Intrauterine Contraceptive Device (IUD), and birth control patch.**

What is natural family planning / fertility awareness?

These are methods to help you tell which days of the month you are most likely to get pregnant. To avoid pregnancy, abstinence is practiced during the fertile times (when you are most likely to get pregnant). Fertility awareness is also used by couples who want to know the best time to try to get pregnant.

The woman must keep an exact daily record of her body temperature, and note changes in the mucus (wetness) that comes from the cervix (opening of the uterus) and vagina. Couples can use this information to assist them in preventing pregnancy or achieving pregnancy. It is a natural method that does not require devices or medicine in the body.

Special teaching is available from doctor, nurse, or group that explains natural methods. It is best to use birth control (such as condom and foam), or not have sex, during your fertile time. Your fertile time may be more than a week each month. You must keep a fertility chart. It takes several months to become familiar with your fertility cycles. It is not a method you can count on if you have irregular periods.

What is a birth control pill?

The birth control pill is taken every day to prevent pregnancy. The pill contains hormones that are similar to a woman's natural hormone. The hormones in the pill stop your ovary from releasing an egg each month. You cannot get pregnant if your body does not release an egg.

See your healthcare provider. You need a prescription for the pill. Take one pill each day at the same time. There are different ways to start the first package. There are 28-day and 21-day packs.

What if I forget to take a pill?

At any time, if it is **less than 24 hours** since you forgot to take the pill:

- Take it right away. You might take two pills on the same day.
- Continue taking one pill every day at the same time. You are still protected from pregnancy.
- Missing any pills (especially at the beginning or end of the pack), can increase your risk of pregnancy.
- If you forget to take a pill and it is **more than 24 hours**, there are specific instructions to follow. Talk to your healthcare provider to know what to do.

What is the birth control injection (Depo Provera®)?

- is an injection given to help prevent pregnancy
- is given every 10-12 weeks on your arm or buttock
- contains a hormone (progestin) that is similar to a woman's natural hormone (the shot does not have estrogen in it)

The hormone stops your body from releasing an egg each month. You cannot get pregnant if your body does not release an egg.

See your health care provider. You need a prescription for the birth control injection. If you get the injection during the first 5 days of your period, it starts to work within 24 hours. If you get the injection at any other time you need to use extra birth control (e.g., condoms) for 7 days.

What is an Intrauterine Contraceptive Device (IUD)?

An IUD is a small, soft, T-shaped device with a nylon string attached to it. An IUD is put into the uterus (womb) by a healthcare provider to help prevent pregnancy.

An IUD can prevent the egg and sperm from joining. A woman cannot get pregnant if the sperm and egg do not meet. If an egg and sperm do join, an IUD can stop the fertilized egg from growing inside the uterus.

What are the advantages of having an IUD?

- An IUD can help prevent pregnancy for 3-5 years.
- If you want to get pregnant, the IUD can be taken out by a healthcare provider at any time.
- It is convenient. Once it is in place, you do not need to remember to take another type of contraception (e.g., birth pills, vaginal contraceptive ring, or birth control patch)
- The copper IUD can decrease the risk of cancer of the uterus.
- The hormonal IUD can make your period lighter. It can also improve cramping during periods. For some women, the hormones can even stop them from having periods.

What is the birth control patch (Evra®)?

- Evra® is a birth control patch you wear on your skin.
- It looks like a thin, light brown bandage.
- A patch is worn for one week at a time. A new patch is put on each week for a three week cycle. The day a new patch is put on is your “patch change day”. You do not put a patch on during week 4 (hormone-free break). This is when you get your period.
- It can be worn during activities (e.g., exercise, showering, and swimming).
- The sticky part of the patch has two hormones similar to women’s natural hormones.
- These hormones are absorbed continuously through your skin into your blood. The hormones stop your body from releasing an egg. You cannot get pregnant if your body does not release an egg.

See your healthcare provider. You need a prescription for the patch. If you start the patch on the first day of your period, you are protected from pregnancy right away. If you start it on any other day, use another form of birth control (e.g., condom) for 7 days.

Where can I find more information?

There are more birth control methods than the ones listed above. Ask your health care provider at one of those clinics before taking a decision.

Sexual and reproductive health - education/health promotion services		403-955-6515
Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre	5 th Floor, 1213-4 th Street SW	403-955-6500
South Calgary Health Centre	31 Sunpark Plaza SE	403-943-9510
Sunridge Professional building	406, 2675-36 St NE	403-944-7666

Sources: Alberta Health Services Website, E-health Info, *Natural Family Planning/Fertility Awareness, Birth Control Pill, Birth Control Injection (Depo Provera®), Intrauterine Contraceptive Device (IUD), Birth Control Patch (Evra®)*,
www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/healthinfo/library/sexual_reproductive_health.htm

Speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free. Mandarin Health Link Calgary 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link Calgary 403-943-1556.

If you want to read any of the previous “Road to Healthy Living” series articles, please go to www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual_health_services.htm and get health information in your own language.