

Birth Control After Your Pregnancy

Your body needs time to fully recover from your last pregnancy before it is ready for your next pregnancy.

How long to wait before getting pregnant again

If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

Too little time between pregnancies raises the risk of problems for your health or the baby's health in the next pregnancy. This includes a higher risk of premature birth (when your baby is born too soon). Premature babies are more likely to have health problems than babies born at full-term. The shorter the time between pregnancies, the higher your risk for premature birth will be for your next pregnancy.

Most obstetric groups recommend women wait at least 6 months to get pregnant again after the birth of their baby. However, some studies show it is best to wait at least 18 months between giving birth and getting pregnant again. This means your baby will be at least 1 1/2 years old before you get pregnant. It is important to talk to your healthcare provider about the amount of time between pregnancies that is right for you.

What you can do:

- Wait 18 months or more after having a baby before getting pregnant again.
- If you are older than 35 or had a miscarriage or stillbirth, talk with your healthcare provider about how long to wait.
- Use effective birth control until you are ready to get pregnant. Talk with your physician or a member of care team about birth control options.

Having at least 18 months between pregnancies may help lower the risk for premature birth in your next pregnancy. Waiting at least 18 months to get pregnant again does not mean for sure that your next baby will be born on time. But, it can help. Talk to your care team about things you can do to help lower your risk.

Postpartum contraception

Postpartum contraception is birth control that you use after you have a baby. If you are not using a birth control method, it is possible to become pregnant very soon after having your baby. Breastfeeding alone may not prevent you from getting pregnant. This handout will tell you some of those methods that you may use in the postpartum period. Talk with your care team about possible side effects and the best option for you.

Most effective birth control methods

Less than 1 out of 100 women get pregnant using these birth control methods.

- **Female sterilization:** Sterilization is surgery that blocks the fallopian tubes. This is permanent birth control. If you choose this option, you do not have to remember to do anything else to prevent pregnancy. (A vasectomy is a procedure for permanent male sterilization.)
- **Birth control implant (Nexplanon®):** This is a small, plastic device the size of a matchstick. It releases hormones to prevent pregnancy (Figure 1). Your physician can insert it under the skin of your upper arm. It provides birth control for up to 3 years.
- **Intrauterine device (IUD):** An IUD is a small, T-shaped piece of plastic. A physician will insert it into your uterus to prevent pregnancy (Figure 2). There are 2 types of IUDs:
 - ParaGard® is an IUD that uses copper, and not hormones, to prevent pregnancy. It provides birth control for up to 10 years.
 - Levonorgesteral IUDs use hormones to prevent pregnancy. They can provide birth control from 3 to 7 years, depending on which type you use.

Figure 1. Birth control implant

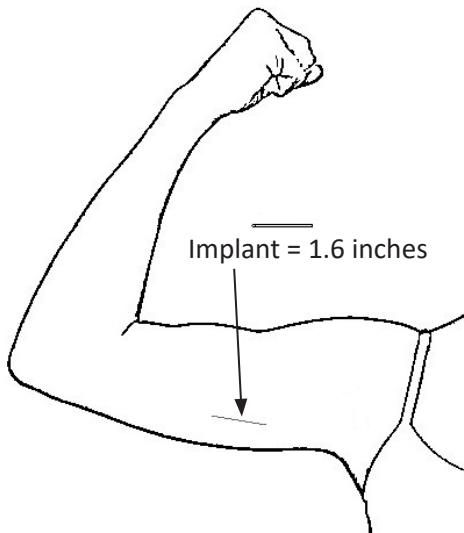
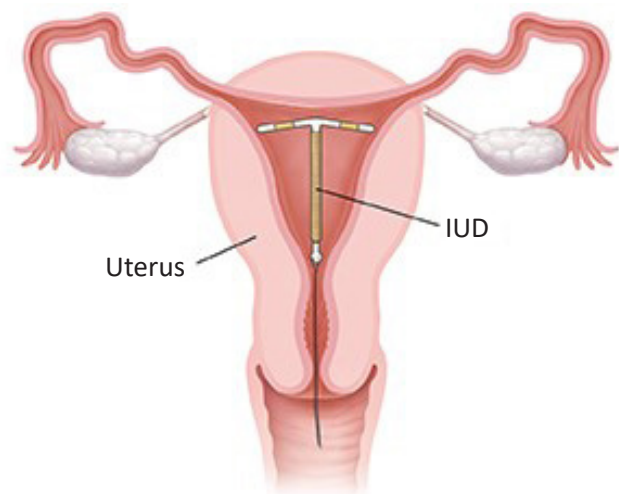


Figure 2: Intrauterine device



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Moderately effective methods

Between 6 and 12 out of every 100 women get pregnant using these birth control methods.

- **Injectable progestin (Depo-Provera®):** This is a shot of hormones given every 3 months.
- **Birth control pills:** You take these pills every day to prevent pregnancy. There are different types of pills to choose from based on your medical history and if you are breastfeeding.

- **Birth control patch:** This skin patch slowly releases hormones to prevent pregnancy. You change the patch every week for 3 weeks, and then remove it for 1 week before restarting it again.
- **Birth control ring:** This flexible, plastic vaginal ring contains hormones to prevent pregnancy. You place it into your vagina for 3 weeks, and then remove it for 1 week, before repeating.
- **Lactational amenorrhea:** When exclusively breastfeeding, meaning you do not supplement your baby's diet with formula, you may not have a period. This may lower your chances of getting pregnant. This may not work well to prevent pregnancy.

Least effective methods of birth control

More than 18 out of every 100 women get pregnant using these birth control methods.

- **Male Condoms:** A condom forms a barrier between the penis and vagina to prevent a pregnancy. Men must put it on before sexual contact. Condoms also prevent some sexually transmitted infections.
- **Spermicide:** Spermicide is a chemical that kills sperm. It comes as a cream, film, foam, gel or suppository. You put the spermicide in your vagina before sex.
- **Withdrawal:** This is when the man removes his penis from the vagina before ejaculation. He needs to do this before he ejaculates. Sometimes, this is not possible.

To learn more

To learn more about when to get pregnant again after your pregnancy and methods of contraception, go to:

- March of Dimes at marchofdimes.org/prematurebirth. March of Dimes materials are for information purposes only. It is not medical advice. Always seek medical advice from your care team.
- Bedsider at bedsider.org, an online birth control support network for women. Scan the QR code below.

