
Get the facts about... Birth Control Choices

Choosing birth control...

There are two ways to enjoy sex without getting pregnant....sex other than vaginal intercourse or vaginal intercourse with birth control. The use of birth control is an individual and private matter. It affects your body, relationships and lifestyle. There is no perfect choice in birth control. Get the facts you need and talk to people you trust. Choose a method that's right for you. Always use latex condoms along with your birth control method to lower your chances of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV - the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

There are many methods of birth control; some work by stopping the woman's ovaries from releasing an ovum (egg) and others work by preventing the man's sperm from meeting the ovum. Here are some of your choices:

- Not having vaginal intercourse
- Condoms - for both men and women
- Spermicides (foam, gel, film, suppositories)
- Sponge
- Diaphragm
- Cervical cap
- Intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD)
- Hormonal methods (the Pill, the Patch)
- Natural Family Planning
- Sterilization - for both men and women

Questions to ask...

It's important to feel comfortable with your birth control method. What suits one person may not suit another.

Answer the following questions for yourself to help you decide which method(s) to use:

- How does the method work?
- Do I need to see a doctor to get it?
- How effective is the method?
- Does the method help prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?
- What are its advantages and disadvantages?
- Is there anything about the method that will discourage me from using it correctly?
- Do I have any health problems that I need to think about when choosing a birth control method?
- Are there any side-effects to the method? Can they cause health problems now or in the future?
- Does the provincial health care plan pay for it? If not, can I afford the cost?
- Will my partner pay for part of the cost?

Think about...

- What are my birth control needs at this time in my life? How do I feel about an unplanned pregnancy?
- How often do I have sex? Will I remember to have my method with me every time I have sex?
- Will I have trouble remembering to use certain birth control methods?
- Can I talk to my partner about birth control? Will my partner support my choice?
- Do I use drugs (including alcohol) that might cause me to take risks?
- Am I opposed to any birth control methods because of personal beliefs?

How well do the different types of birth control work?

This chart shows the percentage of typical users who would not get pregnant while using the method of birth control for 1 year*.

No vaginal intercourse	100%
Condom	88-97%
Condom plus spermicide	95-99%
The Pill	97-99%
The Patch	99%
IUCD	98-99%
Diaphragm and jelly	82-94%
Cervical cap	82-94%
Sponge**	90% approx.

Spermicides	79-94%
Female Condom	79-95%
Depo-Provera (injection)	99.7%
Vasectomy	99.9%
Tubal ligation	99.6%
Natural Family Planning	81-98%
No Method	15%

*Adapted from *Contraceptive Technology* 1994-96, Hatcher et al.

**Manufacturer's information.

Getting birth control...

You can get some types of birth control at a pharmacy without a prescription. You'll have to see a doctor to get a diaphragm or cap, an IUCD or the Pill. Your visit to the doctor should include:

- information about all the birth control methods available
- help in making the best choice for you
- instructions on how to use the method you choose

It's a good idea to see your health care provider regularly for general health care and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STI's).

Choosing a doctor

- It's important to feel comfortable with your doctor.
- Your doctor should give you enough time to talk about your health care needs.
- You have the right to ask questions and get answers that you understand. It helps to write your questions down on a piece of paper and take it with you.
- You have the right to have someone with you for the whole appointment, including the physical exam.
- You have the right to make decisions about your health care without anyone else knowing about it.
- You have the right to change doctors.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about birth control from your public health nurse, community health clinic, doctor or pharmacist. You can go to the public library to get information about a variety of health issues. It may also be helpful to talk to friends about their experiences with different birth control methods.

You can call the ***Facts of Life Line*** to talk about birth control, sexuality, relationships, STIs or pregnancy options. **Call 947-9222 in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-432-1957.**

You can also check out this website:
www.serc.mb.ca.

Suggested reading...

Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century;
Boston Women's Health Collective, Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Sex Sense: Canadian Contraception Guide;
Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, 2000.