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# Get the facts about... Intra-uterine Contraceptive Device (IUCD)

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## 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).

## Why choose an IUCD?

The intra-uterine contraceptive device (IUCD) is 98-99% effective in preventing pregnancy. Once it is in place, you won't have to worry about birth control for one or two years or more, depending on the type of IUCD.

## Does it protect me from STIs and HIV?

If you decide to use this method, you will still have to use latex condoms to reduce your risk of getting an STI or HIV infection.

## What is an IUCD?

An IUCD is a small piece of plastic that a doctor or nurse inserts into your uterus through the vagina to prevent pregnancy. It is about 1½ inches (4 cm) long. There are several different types of IUCDs. The most common IUCD is T-shaped and coated with copper. Another type of IUCD contains a hormone (progestin) that is slowly released.

## How does an IUCD work?

Using an IUCD may:

- cause slight swelling of the lining of the uterus so that a fertilized egg can't attach itself to the uterus;
- move the egg more quickly through the fallopian tube so that it may not become mature enough to be fertilized by sperm;
- thicken the mucus at the cervix (progestin-releasing IUCDs) so that sperm can't get into the uterus.

## How do I use an IUCD?

- If you decide to use an IUCD, you will need to have an examination to check for pregnancy or any infections.
- A doctor or nurse has to insert an IUCD. The best time to do this is during your period.
- The doctor or nurse will do a pelvic exam and then insert a speculum (instrument) into your vagina so that she or he can see your cervix and wash it with an antiseptic solution.
- Next the doctor will insert an IUCD into your uterus. This may be uncomfortable and you may want to ask for pain pills ahead of time.
- An IUCD can be left in the uterus for up to two years or longer. The progestin-releasing IUCD needs to be replaced once a year.
- Some doctors will leave the two plastic threads or strings that hang down through the cervix into the vagina. The cervix is the opening to the uterus. The threads or strings are very thin and do not hang outside the body. You can check that the IUCD is still in place by feeling for these strings after each period.
- Some doctors will cut the strings so that you cannot feel them.

## What do I do if I want my IUCD taken out?

If you feel uncomfortable or have side-effects and want to have your IUCD taken out, you *must* see a doctor or nurse. Do not try to take an IUCD out by yourself.

## Are there any side effects?

### Minor side-effects...

- cramping and discomfort when the IUCD is put in (mild to moderate)
- heavier and more painful periods

### Serious side-effects...

A small number of women suffer more serious side-effects such as infections, a punctured uterus or infertility.

Call your doctor immediately if you have:

- bleeding (heavy or continuous)
- fever/chills
- an unusual smell coming from your vagina which may indicate infection
- backache (severe)
- cramps (severe)

## What are the advantages of an IUCD?

- This is an effective method of birth control.
- You don't have to think about birth control when you have sex.
- It doesn't cost a lot, but if cost is a problem, contact your public health nurse or a community health clinic.
- It can be used for a long period of time.

## What are the disadvantages of an IUCD?

- An IUCD doesn't protect against HIV or other STIs.
- If you get an STI with an IUCD in place, there is a greater chance of getting pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID could cause scarring in your reproductive organs. You may not be able to have children as a result.
- An IUCD can increase your chances of having an ectopic pregnancy (e.g. pregnancy that grows in a fallopian tube).
- You may need to check the strings to make sure the IUCD is still in place.
- There is a small chance that your uterus will push the IUCD out. (This is more likely for a woman who has never had a baby.)

## Where can I get more information about IUCDs?

You can get more information from your public health nurse, community health clinic, or doctor.

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](http://www.serc.mb.ca).