



CONOSCERE PER SCEGLIERE

contraception



SERVIZIO SANITARIO REGIONALE
EMILIA-ROMAGNA

 Regione Emilia-Romagna

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Starting from a young age, an important part of protecting your general health and wellbeing is taking care of your sexual and reproductive health, at every stage of life. With this in mind, we strive to reach out to all women, couples, and youngsters of both sexes living in our region, to provide them with all the information they need to make informed choices about their health. In this way, we aim to play our part in ensuring that pregnancy is a happy event and that, thanks to correct use of contraception, fewer and fewer women - as per the trend in recent years - resort to voluntary termination of pregnancy, which is always a painful and difficult choice. That is why, at Regional level, we are promoting and boosting targeted services dedicated above all to young and very young people. Since 2018, Emilia-Romagna region has been offering free medical examinations and contraception, with a view to ensuring safe, protected intercourse and improving sexual health awareness: these services are available to young men and women up to 26 years of age and to women who are unemployed or affected by the financial crisis. These groups can access our family advisory clinics as part of a fertility management programme following childbirth or a termination.

“Contraception: making an informed choice” is a booklet designed to provide basic information. To clarify any doubts or problems, and for practical advice, women and couples can contact the family advisory services (*Consultori familiari*), youth sexual health centres (*Spazi giovani*), new young adult centres (*Spazi giovani adulti*) and centres for immigrant women and their children (*Spazi donne immigrate e loro bambini*) in every town across our region, where they will find a range of services and professionals ready to listen and help.

Sergio Venturi

Councillor for Health Policies
Emilia-Romagna Region

why use contraception

Contraception, also known as birth control, is the term used to indicate the various means, methods and actions that allow a woman to avoid becoming pregnant following sexual intercourse.

It therefore becomes a way of ensuring that pregnancy is a conscious choice, and that every child conceived is wanted and loved. For this to happen, people must be fully informed about the various methods of contraception, so they can choose which methods are best suited to their personal needs. There can be many reasons for wanting to avoid a pregnancy and these can be related to the personal or professional sphere. Using a birth control method and protection from sexually transmitted diseases allows people to enjoy sexual relations with peace of mind.

stories of couples... stories of contraception

All these women have very different life stories and plans, but they all share the need to decide when they want to have a child and when to avoid a pregnancy, at least in a given period of their life.

Lucia and Davide have successful careers but their marriage is going through a very difficult time. They would like a child, but not right now.

Giulia has started university, she has a great relationship with **Marco**, but before starting a family she would like to finish her studies and focus on her future career.

Aicha, Kira, Valdete and Iman have followed their husbands and, arriving in Italy, have realised how difficult life can be as an immigrant in a new country. They have no relatives here to help with the burden of day-to-day life and bringing up children.

Sofia is almost afraid to think of having another child. She already has one child and since her partner lost his job, the only money they have comes from her hourly cleaning job or from her parents.

Lisa and Paolo have a great relationship, they only became a couple a short while ago, so for now they want to get to know one another better and it would be too early to have a child.

Valbona, Edoukou, Melika and Luan came to Italy because they wanted to choose their own future. Here, at least according to what they have heard, women should have more opportunities and more freedom. But getting ahead in life can be a struggle and sometimes it means that there is no immediate room for a pregnancy.

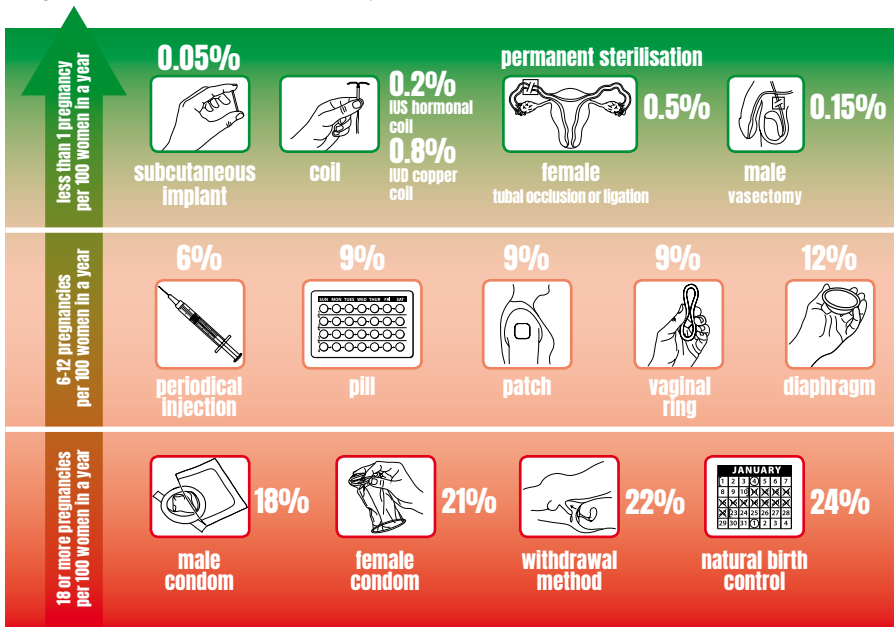
Elisa and Giacomo have been in a steady relationship for a number of years. They already have two children, aged 11 and 15. They feel that their family is complete and they do not want any more children.

Alida, on the other hand, would love to have a child. Her marriage is solid and she has no financial worries, but the cancer she was diagnosed with a couple of years ago has left her far too frightened to contemplate a pregnancy.

how to choose a birth control method

In Italy today there are various birth control methods available that work in different ways: there are barrier methods, hormonal methods, reversible methods but also permanent methods, i.e. which permanently prevent a woman from becoming pregnant. In order to choose the right method of contraception, people must have all the relevant information on the contraception available, the correct usage of each, any potential health risks and the level of effectiveness in terms of preventing pregnancy. This information must be provided by trained healthcare professionals: it is important to be very aware of the fact that information found on the Internet or passed on by friends or acquaintances may not be exact, or may even be completely wrong. The midwives and doctors at the family advisory services, youth sexual health centres, young adult centres and centres for immigrant women and their children, are trained to help women and couples to choose the best birth control method for them, taking into consideration their individual characteristics, preferences and needs.

the effectiveness of a birth control method is measured by its ability to prevent pregnancy. Any evaluation of this effectiveness must take into account possible human error (forgetfulness, timings...). The diagram below illustrates the actual effectiveness of the various contraceptives as recorded in the general population, that is to say taking into consideration the most common user errors. The effectiveness figures reported here can be increased by paying careful attention to the usage instructions for each contraceptive.



(Source: Center for Disease Control. EFFECTIVENESS OF FAMILY PLANNING METHODS).

protection against sexually transmitted diseases

👍 The only possible protection against sexually transmitted diseases (for example HIV, hepatitis, gonorrhoea, herpes, syphilis, chlamydia etc.) is correct use of the male or female condom during sexual intercourse. No other form of contraception can offer protection against sexually transmitted diseases. For improved effectiveness, you can use double protection (hormonal/mechanical + condom).

choosing a contraceptive is also an opportunity to evaluate your health

When you come to choose a contraceptive, the chat with the midwife or doctor (gynaecologist or andrologist) at your family advisory service, or with your family doctor, can also present the perfect opportunity to assess your overall health. It is a good time to discuss the importance and appropriateness of some useful check-ups (pelvic and breast examination, andrological examination, cervical cancer screenings such as PAP test and HPV test).

During this consultation, you will be able to clarify any doubts or problems concerning male or female sexuality: in other words, you can talk to a healthcare professional in complete confidence and discuss problems like lack of sexual desire, premature ejaculation, lack of sexual arousal and/or the inability to orgasm. You can also use the interview to ask for information on: fertility, family planning, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, links between lifestyle (diet, exercise, drug use, alcohol consumption and smoking) and reproductive health.



Free contraception at family advisory services in Emilia-Romagna

In Emilia-Romagna, men and women can access family advisory services free of charge for advice and a medical examination if necessary, and to consult with a gynaecologist or midwife on the birth control method best suited to their needs.

In addition, from 1st January 2018, the family advisory services of local health boards (AUSL) and youth sexual health centres can also provide free contraception (including emergency contraception) and a consultation with a doctor or midwife to:

- all men and women under 26 years of age,
- all women from 26 to 45 years of age with an exemption due to unemployment (E02) or female workers affected by the economic crisis (E99), in the 12 months following childbirth,
- all women from 26 to 45 years of age with an exemption due to unemployment (E02) or female workers affected by the economic crisis (E99), in the 24 months following a voluntary termination of pregnancy.

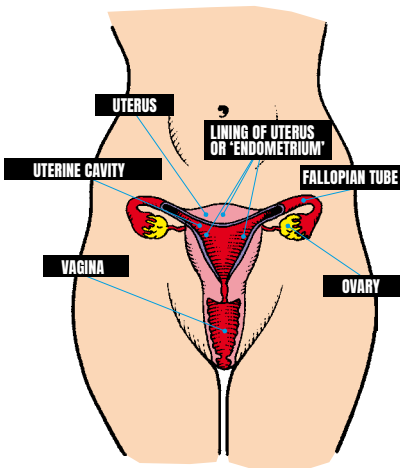
To qualify for free birth control and a consultation with a doctor or midwife, you must be registered with the Italian national health service and have residency status plus a family doctor in Emilia-Romagna, or be in possession of an STP card (*'Stranieri Temporaneamente Presenti'* - Temporarily Present Foreigner card) or a PSU (*'Permesso di Soggiorno per motivi Umanitari'* - Humanitarian Permit of Stay).

All the birth control methods presented in this booklet are available free of charge, with the exception of the periodical injection, the diaphragm and the natural method with computerised fertility monitoring.

our bodies

females

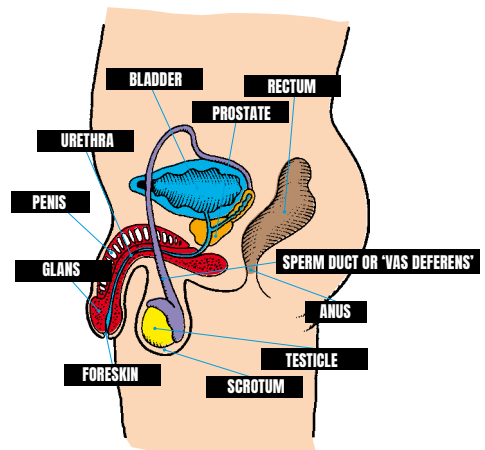
A girl's first period signals that her ovaries have started to produce mature eggs. Each period, (1st-5th day of a 28-day cycle), is followed by three phases. The first is called pre-ovulation or the 'follicular phase' (6th-11th day of a 28-day cycle): an egg matures in the ovary. The ovaries typically take turns at releasing an egg each month. The second phase is called ovulation (12th-15th day of a 28-day cycle): a mature egg is released by the ovary and travels slowly down the fallopian tube, where it can be fertilised if you have unprotected sexual intercourse. An egg can live for around 24 hours. During this phase, the uterus prepares to receive a fertilised egg. The third phase is called post-ovulation or the 'luteal phase' (16th-28th day of a 28-day cycle): if the mature egg is not fertilised, it begins to degenerate. The uterus prepares to shed its lining (endometrium) which will be eliminated with the menstrual flow, your period.



If the egg is fertilised, in the ovary the follicle develops into the corpus luteum which produces progesterone, the hormone that supports the pregnancy in the early stages. Fertilisation can occur if you have unprotected sexual intercourse. The duration of the various phases of the menstrual cycle can vary considerably from one woman to another, and women can also have cycles of varying duration from one month to another. To calculate the length of your menstrual cycle, it is a good idea to mark the first day of each period on the calendar.

males

When a boy reaches puberty, his testicles start producing sperm and will continue to do so for the rest of his life. During sexual intercourse, the man ejaculates semen, which contains sperm, inside the woman's vagina. Generally speaking, sperm cells can live for a period ranging from 24 to 120 hours.



the menstrual cycle

(for a 28- day cycle)

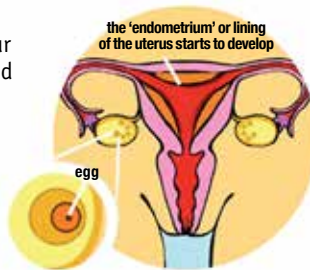
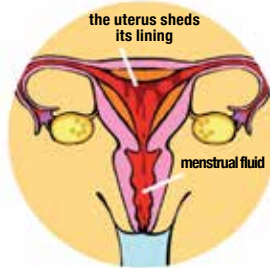
1st

week of the cycle

Days 1-5

period

If the egg is not fertilised, it is shed together with the lining of the uterus that had been preparing to receive it (endometrium). This explains the loss of blood, in other words, your period, which is also called menstruation.



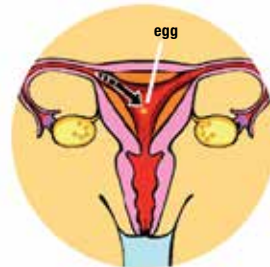
2nd

week of the cycle

Days 6-11

pre-ovulation phase

Each month an egg matures in one of the ovaries. The ovaries typically take turns at releasing of an egg each month.



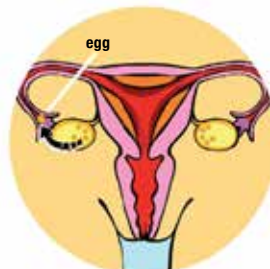
3rd

week of the cycle

Days 12-15

ovulation

When the mature egg is released by the ovary it makes its way into the fallopian tube. This is ovulation. An egg can live for around 24 hours. This is the period of maximum fertility. After ovulation, the uterus prepares to receive a fertilised egg. The walls of the uterus become thick and spongy, with an increased blood supply, forming a sort of 'nest' to protect the egg.



4th

week of the cycle

Days 16-28

post-ovulation or 'luteal phase'

If the mature egg is not fertilised, after 24 hours it starts to degenerate. The uterus prepares to shed its lining, which will be your next period. After that, the cycle starts over again.

types of birth control

barrier contraceptive methods

These methods include: the male condom, the female condom and the diaphragm. These are known as barrier methods because they act as a physical barrier, preventing sperm from reaching the woman's uterus. To improve their effectiveness, they can be used together with a spermicide cream.

hormonal contraception

These methods are based on the woman taking a dose of hormones. These hormones can take several different forms: a pill to be swallowed, a patch to be worn on the skin, a vaginal ring or a subcutaneous implant.

coils

These are small devices that are inserted in the uterus. There are two types: the first type is also called an 'intrauterine system' or IUS and it releases hormones into the uterus; the second type, also called an 'intrauterine device' or IUD, includes copper coils. Coils can be used by women who have already had children, as well as by those who have not.

natural birth control

Natural birth control methods are based on abstaining from sexual intercourse during a woman's most fertile days. You can identify this 'fertility window' from subjective signs and measurements.

emergency contraception

This method is not for regular use, but can be used to reduce the risk of pregnancy following unprotected or "unsafe" sex.

permanent methods

Permanent contraceptive methods consist of male sterilisation (vasectomy) and female sterilisation (tubal occlusion or ligation). These are surgical procedures which almost entirely eliminate the possibility of pregnancy (around 1-5 in 1000).

male condom

it protects against sexually transmitted diseases

for this reason, it should also be used for oral or anal intercourse. To boost its effectiveness, it can be used in combination with a hormonal or mechanical contraceptive.

what it is

The condom is an extremely thin sheath made of latex rubber or hypoallergenic latex-free material which is worn on the penis. It catches the man's semen, preventing sperm from entering the woman's vagina.

effectiveness

Over the course of a year, only 2 out of 100 women using this method correctly (see "what to do") will become pregnant. Nonetheless, taking into account the most frequent user errors typically made, in reality 18 out of 100 women will become pregnant. The level of protection offered by a condom increases if used together with a spermicide (gel, foam, pessaries). This is the only birth control method that protects both sexual partners from the risk of sexually transmitted infections during vaginal, anal and oral intercourse.

It provides good protection against HIV and other infections that are transmitted through genital fluid such as trichomonas, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. In the case of other infections such as genital warts, genital herpes and syphilis, the mucous membranes and any infected skin must be covered to ensure protection.

what to do

No prescription or medical examination is needed. Condoms can be bought at the chemist's, tobacconist's, at supermarkets and from vending machines. Spermicides are also sold over the counter at chemist's shops.

For correct use, a condom must be put on before the start of sexual intercourse and well before penetration (due to possible production of pre-ejaculate fluid that contains live sperm) and removed only after intercourse. To avoid the condom accidentally slipping off, with the risk that semen spills and comes into contact with the woman's genitals, it must be held firmly in place



at the base of the penis before withdrawal from the vagina. Condoms are disposable and must always be discarded after use. Before use, always check the expiry date. The packet must not be kept near any heat sources (so, not in a glove compartment or a wallet) or near objects that could damage the wrapping (for example, keys, scissors, etc.). It must be handled with care (be careful not to damage it with teeth, nails or jewellery).

It is best to use lubricated condoms; for those that are not, apply a water-based lubricant gel or 'lube' on the inside and outside too in order to prevent splitting (oil-based lubricants like creams, vaseline, butter or oil can favour splitting).

advantages

Condoms have no associated health risks, do not require medical assistance and are easy to use. They allow men to actively and effectively participate in contraception.

They are a useful alternative to other methods, also for established couples, for example during breastfeeding.

disadvantages

- In the event of incorrect use or a manufacturing defect, there is a risk that a condom might split or slip off during sexual intercourse.
- In addition, a condom can be a source of embarrassment, as a "physical barrier" between partners. To get around this problem, it is best to try putting a condom on a few times, without any hurry, before sexual intercourse.

cost

The cost varies depending on the type and place of purchase: in general, the price ranges from between 1 and 1.7 euros per condom.

female condom

**it protects
against
sexually
transmitted
diseases**

**To boost its effectiveness, it
can be used in combination
with a hormonal or
mechanical contraceptive.**

what it is

The female condom is a soft, strong, clear sheath made of polyurethane, measuring around 17 cm long, which is inserted into the vagina before sexual intercourse. It protects against pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted diseases, as it catches the man's semen and prevents it from entering the vagina. It features a flexible ring at both ends: the internal ring is used to insert the female condom and to keep the end closed against the neck of uterus. The outer ring is soft and must remain outside the vagina during sexual intercourse: it covers the area around the vaginal opening, forming a barrier between the penis and the vagina itself, as well as the cervix and the outer genitals. It is lubricated with a silicone-based product.

effectiveness

Taking into account the most frequent user errors, around 21 out of 100 women will become pregnant. This level of protection increases when it is used correctly (5 out of 100 women in a year).

what to do

No prescription or medical examination is needed. Female condoms can be bought or ordered from a chemist's. They should not be used together with a male condom, as this may lead to splitting. They must only be used once, and then discarded. There is no need to remove the female condom immediately after intercourse: to remove it, twist the outer ring to prevent semen leaking out. This birth control method requires some practice: it is therefore a good idea to practice inserting and removing it a few times before using one for the first time during sexual intercourse.



advantages

When used correctly, the female condom is just as effective as other barrier contraceptive methods. It can be inserted up to a few hours before intercourse, so it does not interrupt sexual spontaneity.

It has no associated health risks, does not require a prescription and allows women to take charge of their own sexuality.

It is already lubricated with a silicone-based product which has no spermicidal effect. The material from which it is made is stronger than the latex rubber used to make the majority of male condoms and does not cause allergic reactions. It offers women a full protective barrier against infections of the outer genitals, as long as they are fully covered by the female condom.

disadvantages

- They are harder to come by than male condoms and their use requires some practice: inexperience initially makes this birth control method not completely safe.
- Some women report side effects, in particular minor irritations.

cost

The average cost is around 2.5 euros each.

diaphragm

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

what it is

The diaphragm is a sort of disc made of silicone that is inserted inside the vagina before sexual intercourse, covering the cervix so that sperm cannot reach the uterus. It is used together with a spermicide cream. The diaphragm is reusable.

effectiveness

When used correctly together with spermicide cream, the diaphragm will result in an unwanted pregnancy in 5 out of 100 women. Nonetheless, taking into account the most frequent user errors typically made, 21 out of 100 women will become pregnant.

what to do

The diaphragm is inserted before sexual intercourse and you need to leave it in place for at least 6 hours after sex before removing it. After removal, you must wash it properly with soap and water. Check it for any signs of damage each time before use.

The diaphragm is prescribed by a doctor or midwife after a medical examination to identify the right size for you. The first time, the doctor or midwife will show you how to insert and remove the diaphragm.

advantages

There is no associated health risk and, once you have learned how, the diaphragm is easy to use. It is reusable and can be inserted several hours before intercourse, the important thing is to remember to use it together with spermicide cream, which you need to apply no more than 2-3 hours before intercourse.



disadvantages

- It does not offer protection against sexually transmitted diseases.
- If you lose or gain weight, or after pregnancy or a termination, you will need to be examined again by a doctor or midwife to check if the size is still right, or needs to be changed.

cost

The cost varies depending on the type and place of purchase: in general, the price ranges from between 40 and 70 euros per diaphragm. It can be reused multiple times; for some models the recommended maximum period of use is two years (which equates to a monthly cost of around 1.5 euros). Spermicide cream also varies in price, ranging from 13 to 18 euros per tube (10-15 applications).

the pill

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well



what it is

This is the term commonly used for the oral contraceptive pill. It contains a combination (combined pill) of two female hormones: oestrogen and progesterone. It prevents pregnancy by stopping ovulation and altering the lining of the uterus and the fallopian tubes.

Taking a pill each day stops your normal menstrual cycle (described on page 9). When you stop taking the pill you have a bleed similar to a period, due to the momentary drop in hormone levels, however with some types of pill there may be no bleeding at all.

effectiveness

The pill is very effective at preventing pregnancy, as less than one woman out of 100 who use it correctly will become pregnant.

However, taking into account the most frequent user errors, in reality 9 women out of 100 will become pregnant. Besides being used as a birth control method, the pill is also used in the treatment of numerous female disorders and/or conditions.

what to do

You take one pill each day for 21 or 28 consecutive days, with or without a break depending on the type of pill. It must be prescribed by a doctor at the family advisory service, your family doctor or another doctor of your choice, who will consider your medical history, measure your blood pressure and, only if necessary, arrange other tests. Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health.

Following an abortion, if there are no contraindications, you can take the pill from the actual day of the surgery. In the case of a medical abortion, you can take the pill from the day of the second abortion pill.

advantages

It is very effective if taken correctly. Besides being used as a birth control method, the pill is used to regulate several disorders and to make periods lighter and less painful. It reduces the risk of developing ovarian and endometrial cancer. Some types of pill improve acne and male-pattern hair growth.

disadvantages

- It is only available on prescription.
- For maximum effectiveness it must be taken at around the same time every day: for this reason, you should establish a routine to make sure you never forget. If you forget to take a pill or several pills, you must follow the instructions on the patient information leaflet very carefully.
- It can be less effective if you take other medication or if you have sickness or diarrhoea.
- Although it can be used safely by most women, it is unsuitable if you have certain conditions or diseases (for example, high blood pressure or thrombosis) or if you smoke.
- Serious problems are extremely rare and are usually linked to blood clotting (thromboembolism). Rarely, the pill can cause less serious side effects such as weight gain, pain and swelling in the legs, slight blood loss, headaches, mood changes or changes in libido. These side effects can lead some women to stop taking the pill altogether, but it is always best to consult your midwife or gynaecologist first because these problems can often be overcome by changing to a different pill without actually stopping and losing contraceptive protection.

cost

The cost of each packet, lasting 28 days, varies according to the type: on average, the price ranges from 5 to 17 euros.

progestogen-only pill ('mini pill')

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

what it is

'Mini pill' is the term commonly used for the oral contraceptive pill containing only one hormone, progestogen. You need to take the mini pill every day, without any break. It prevents pregnancy by thickening the cervical secretions, thus preventing sperm from travelling up the fallopian tubes, stopping ovulation and altering the lining of the uterus. Taking a pill each day stops your normal menstrual cycle (described on page 9).

effectiveness

Its effectiveness is similar to that of the combined pill.

what to do

You take 1 pill each day without any break. At the end of the 28-pill packet, you start over with another packet, without skipping any days. It must be prescribed by a doctor at the family advisory service, your family doctor or another doctor of your choice, who will consider your medical history and, if necessary, arrange other tests.

Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health.

Following an abortion, if there are no contraindications, you can take the pill from the actual day of the surgery. In the case of a medical abortion, you can take the pill from the day of the second abortion pill.

advantages

It is very effective if taken correctly. This can be a good contraceptive choice for women who cannot use oestrogen, which is in the combined pill.

It can be used by women who are breastfeeding, even in the first 6 months after childbirth, since it has no effect on the amount of milk produced and no adverse effects on nursing infants.



disadvantages

- It is only available on prescription.
- For guaranteed effectiveness, it must be taken at around the same time every day. For this reason, you should establish a routine to make sure you always take it at the same time, and never more than 12 hours later than your usual time.
- It can be less effective if you take other medication or if you have sickness or diarrhoea.
- It can be used safely by most women, and is unsuitable only if you have certain serious conditions or diseases.
- Some of the most common side effects are irregular periods (bleeding may stop altogether or be lighter, or else be more frequent and irregular), a bloated feeling, weight gain and acne.

cost

The cost of each packet, lasting 28 days, varies according to the type: on average, the price ranges from 8 to 16 euros.

patch

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well



what it is

The contraceptive patch is a small sticky patch that contains the same female hormones used in the combined pill (oestrogen and progesterone). The patch releases a daily dose of hormones through the skin and works just like the pill, preventing ovulation.

effectiveness

Its level of effectiveness is similar to that of the pill: in the general population, 9 out of 100 women will become pregnant. With correct use, i.e. when all the instructions for use are followed scrupulously, this effectiveness increases.

what to do

There are several areas of the body where you can apply the patch (buttocks, back, tummy, upper arm...); you replace the patch with a new one each week for three weeks, then skip a week, then start over again.

It must be prescribed by a doctor at the family advisory service, your family doctor or another doctor of your choice, who will consider your medical history and, if necessary, arrange other tests. Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health. Following an abortion, if there are no contraindications, you can apply the patch from the actual day of the surgery. In the case of a medical abortion, you can apply the patch on the day of the second abortion pill.

advantages

It is very effective if used correctly. It offers the same advantages as the combined pill (it regulates periods, making them lighter and less painful, plus it reduces the risk of developing ovarian and endometrial cancer). It is easier to use than the pill, since you only need to change it once a week, which reduces the risk of forgetting. It is still just as effective if you have sickness or diarrhoea.

disadvantages

- It is only available on prescription.
- For maximum effectiveness, you need to follow the instructions for use very carefully and make sure the patch sticks firmly in place (it is water-resistant, but may come off if you are in a very hot, humid place, such as a sauna, for a long time).
- It can be less effective if you also take other medications.
- It is less effective if you weigh more than 90 Kg.
- Although it can be used safely by most women, it is unsuitable if you have certain conditions or diseases (for example, high blood pressure or thrombosis) or if you are over 35 years old and a smoker.
- Some women can have a local allergic reaction with skin irritation and itching.
- Serious problems are extremely rare and are usually linked to blood clotting (thromboembolism). Rarely, the pill can cause less serious side effects such as weight gain, pain and swelling in the legs, slight blood loss, headaches, mood changes or changes in libido. These side effects can lead some women to stop using the patch altogether, but it is always best to consult your midwife or gynaecologist first because these problems can often be overcome by changing to a different birth control method.

cost

The average price is 16 euros every 28 days.

vaginal ring

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well



what it is

It is a slim, clear, flexible ring that you place inside your vagina, and it contains the same female hormones as the combined pill. You insert the ring in your vagina and remove it after three weeks, then skip a week before starting over by inserting a new ring.

The vaginal ring releases a daily dose of the female hormones oestrogen and progestogen, and works just like the pill and the patch, preventing ovulation.

effectiveness

Its level of effectiveness is similar to that of the pill: taking into account the most frequent user errors, 9 out of 100 women will become pregnant. With correct use, i.e. when all the instructions for use are followed scrupulously, this effectiveness increases.

what to do

You place the ring inside your vagina, leaving it in place for 21 days. At the end of those three weeks, you remove the ring and discard it, and wait 7 days before inserting a new one. It must be prescribed by a doctor at the family advisory service, your family doctor or another doctor of your choice, who will consider your medical history and, if necessary, arrange other tests. Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health. Following an abortion, if there are no contraindications, you can insert the ring from the actual day of the surgery. In the case of a medical abortion, you can insert the ring from the day of the second abortion pill.

advantages

It is very effective if used correctly. Besides being used as a birth control method, the vaginal ring regulates periods, making them lighter and less painful, plus it improves acne and reduces the risk of developing ovarian and endometrial cancer. It is very simple to use because you only need to insert

it and remove it once a month, making it easy to remember. It is still just as effective if you have sickness or diarrhoea.

disadvantages

- It is only available on prescription.
- For maximum effectiveness, it is important that you insert and remove the ring on exactly the right days.
- It can be less effective if you also take other medications.
- Although it can be used safely by most women, it is unsuitable if you have certain conditions or diseases (for example, high blood pressure or thrombosis) or if you smoke.
- Serious problems are extremely rare and are usually linked to blood clotting (thromboembolism). Rarely, the pill can cause less serious side effects such as weight gain, pain and swelling in the legs, slight blood loss, headaches, mood changes or changes in libido. These side effects can lead some women to stop using the patch altogether, but it is always best to consult your midwife or gynaecologist first because these problems can often be overcome by changing to a different birth control method.

cost

The cost is around 19-20 euros every 28 days.

periodical injection

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

what it is

It consists of an intramuscular injection containing the hormone progesterone (medroxyprogesterone acetate), which you need to have every three months. It prevents pregnancy by thickening the cervical secretions, thus preventing sperm from travelling up the fallopian tubes, stopping ovulation and altering the lining of the uterus.

effectiveness

It is highly effective, only 6 women out of 1000 having the injection will become pregnant.

what to do

It must be prescribed by a doctor at the family advisory service, your family doctor or another doctor of your choice, who will consider your medical history and, if necessary, arrange for you to have other tests. You are given the injection in your arm or buttock every three months.

advantages

This can be a good birth control method for women who are breastfeeding (starting from six weeks after childbirth) or who cannot use a combined hormonal contraceptive (for example women with high blood pressure or smokers over 35 years of age) but also those who do not want a contraceptive that must be taken every day, an intrauterine contraceptive or a long-lasting contraceptive implant. Compared to other contraceptives, its effectiveness is less influenced by other medications.

disadvantages

- When you stop the injections, it can take a while for ovulation and your fertility to return to normal.
- It can cause side effects such as a momentary painful reaction at the injection site, irregular periods, weight gain, a bloated feeling, mood changes and headaches which can continue for several months even after you stop the injections.



- This form of contraception is not advisable for women under 18 or over 45 years of age or those at risk of osteoporosis.
- In Italy this drug is not registered for use as a contraceptive, which can make it difficult to obtain on prescription. In addition, it requires informed consent, making it a second-choice contraceptive, for use in the absence of other acceptable methods.

cost

The cost of an injection, which lasts for 3 months, is around 5 euros (equivalent to 1.5 euros per month).

subcutaneous implant

**it does not
protect against
sexually
transmitted
diseases, so you
need to use a condom as well**

what it is

It consists of a small, slim plastic rod, 2 mm in diameter and 4 cm long, which is placed under the skin on the inside of your upper arm and releases the hormone progesterone into your bloodstream.

It prevents pregnancy by stopping ovulation and by thickening the cervical secretions, making it difficult for sperm to move, and by altering the lining of the uterus.

effectiveness

It is one of the most effective contraceptive methods available and is virtually error-proof. Over the course of a year, less than 1 woman out of a 100 using this method will become pregnant. The implant remains effective for 3 years in women of normal weight, with a shorter duration in the case of obesity.

what to do

The implant must be prescribed and inserted by a gynaecologist, who will consider your medical history and, if necessary, arrange for you to have other tests. You can contact your family advisory service directly. Once the implant is in place, it is important to check that you can always feel it under the skin and that it does not move around.

Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health.

advantages

There are very few contraindications (the same as those for the progesterone-only pill) and the implant can be suitable for women who cannot use combined hormonal contraceptives (pill, vaginal ring, patch) or who want a very high level of contraceptive safety. It is a long-lasting contraceptive method which is also suitable for women who are afraid they might forget to take a contraceptive regularly. It can be used during breastfeeding.



disadvantages

- It is only available on prescription and must be inserted and removed by a qualified medical professional.
- It can be less effective if you also take other medications.
- It can be used safely by most women, and is only unsuitable if you have certain conditions or diseases.
- Some of the most common side effects are: irregular periods (bleeding may stop altogether or be lighter, or else be more frequent and irregular), a bloated feeling, weight gain, acne, headaches, mood changes. It cannot be managed independently by women, as it needs to be prescribed, inserted and removed by a gynaecologist.

cost

The initial cost of the implant is 195 euros, in addition to the cost of the ticket for having it inserted. Given its extended duration, that equates to an average monthly cost of around 5 euros.

hormonal coil (IUS - Intrauterine System)

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

what it is

It is a small T-shaped medical device made of flexible plastic, ranging in length from 3 - 3.5 centimetres and just a few millimetres thick. It is inserted into the uterus where it releases a daily dose of female hormone (progesterone).

It prevents pregnancy by thickening the cervical secretions, thus preventing sperm from travelling up the fallopian tubes, and by altering the lining of the uterus.

It can be used by women who have already had children, as well as by those who have not.

effectiveness

It is very effective: over the course of a year, less than 1 woman out of 100 using this method will become pregnant. The IUS remains effective for between three and five years, depending on the model used.

what to do

The IUS must be prescribed and inserted by a gynaecologist, who will consider your medical history, give you a preliminary examination and, if necessary, arrange for you to have other tests. You can contact your family advisory service directly.

Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health.

advantages

It has very few contraindications and can be used by women who cannot use combined hormonal contraceptives (pill, vaginal ring, patch).

It is a long-lasting birth control method which ensures a very high level of contraceptive safety. Its effectiveness is not affected by other medications. The IUS designed to last for 5 years is also used for the treatment of heavy periods and some pre-cancerous lesions of the lining of the uterus.



disadvantages

- It cannot be managed independently by women, as it needs to be prescribed and inserted by a gynaecologist. In addition, a check-up is recommended 4-6 weeks after insertion, with additional follow-ups in the event of problems.
- Some of the most common side effects are irregular periods (bleeding may stop altogether or be lighter or else be more frequent and irregular), especially in the first few months after insertion.

cost

The cost of the hormonal coil (IUS) varies depending on its duration: the IUS that lasts for 3 years costs around 195 euros, while the model lasting 5 years costs 250 euros. Added to that is the cost of the ticket for the medical examination and insertion of the device. Considering the prolonged duration of use (3-5 years), this method works out costing an average of 4 to 6 euros per month.

COIL (IUD - Intrauterine Device)

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

what it is

It is a small flexible plastic and copper device of various shapes, ranging in length from 3 - 3.5 centimetres and just a few millimetres thick which is inserted into the uterus and is very effective at preventing pregnancy. This type of coil prevents pregnancy by releasing copper ions into the uterus, preventing a fertilised egg from implanting. It can be used by women who have already had children, as well as by those who have not.

effectiveness

It is very effective: over the course of a year, less than 1 woman out of 100 using this method will become pregnant. The IUD lasts for five years or longer, depending on the type.

what to do

The IUS must be prescribed and inserted by a gynaecologist, who will consider your medical history, give you a preliminary examination and, if necessary, arrange for you to have other tests. You can contact your family advisory service directly. Subsequent periodical check-ups are recommended to detect any changes in clinical conditions or your general health.

advantages

It has very few contraindications and can be used by women who cannot use combined hormonal contraceptives (pill, vaginal ring, patch) or progestogen-only contraceptives (hormonal coil, subcutaneous implant, mini pill).

It is a long-lasting contraceptive method which is also suitable for women who are afraid they might forget to take a contraceptive regularly, or who want a very high level of contraceptive safety.



disadvantages

- Copper coils can sometimes make your periods heavier and longer; in addition, they can make period pain worse.
- Since the device contains metal, it may mean that you cannot have a magnetic resonance imaging-type (MRI) scan.
- It cannot be managed independently by women, as it needs to be prescribed and inserted by a gynaecologist. In addition, a check-up is recommended 4-6 weeks after insertion, with additional follow-ups in the event of problems.
- It does not prevent the risk of an ectopic pregnancy.

cost

The cost of the IUD, or 'copper coil' is around 40-70 euros.

Added to that is the cost of the ticket for the medical examination and insertion of the device. Considering the prolonged duration of use (5 years), that equates to around 2 euros per month.

natural birth control

they do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

Natural birth control methods are based on abstaining from sexual intercourse during a woman's most fertile days. You can identify this 'fertility window' from subjective signs and measurements.

It is important to learn how to use these methods correctly. The health professionals at the family advisory service will be able to give you all the necessary information and clear up any doubts you might have. These same methods can also be used **in reverse** by couples who **want to get pregnant**, by identifying the most fertile days in which to have sexual intercourse. Below is a summary of the various natural birth control methods.

1. Basal temperature method

This method was developed based on observations of how a woman's body temperature changes over the course of her monthly cycle. Taking your temperature daily upon waking up allows you to identify the most fertile days of your cycle.

2. Knaus-Ogino or 'rhythm' method

(calendar-based or counting days)

This is a statistical method that identifies your most fertile days based on the duration of your previous 12 menstrual cycles, which you must accurately record on the calendar.

3. Cervical secretions method

(Billings)

With this method, you need to observe the appearance and consistency of your cervical secretions each day, and assess the sensations in your outer genital organs. Based on these changes, you can identify your fertile days.

4. Sympto-thermal method

This method is based on a combination of recorded body temperature plus observation of vaginal secretions and other signs that accompany ovulation, such as alterations of the neck of the uterus and breast tenderness.



5. Computerised fertility monitoring method

This is a small computer designed to store information on your personal menstrual characteristics and measure two hormones present in your morning urine through two test sticks. It can only be used by women whose menstrual cycle lasts between 25 and 35 days.

effectiveness

Evaluation of actual effectiveness of natural birth control methods allows us to state that 24 couples out of 100 using these methods will get pregnant. This level of contraceptive safety increases with correct use, with the percentage of pregnancy ranging from 5 to 9 couples out of 100, however these methods are still less effective than others.

advantages

These methods do not require any medical examinations or check-ups, or any medication. They are well accepted by many religions. They help you to have a better understanding of how your body works and they promote intimacy within the couple.

disadvantages

- They are based on partners being in complete agreement and in some couples the need to abstain from vaginal intercourse during the fertile window can lead to tension.
- Some conditions (infections, use of douches, vaginal gels or spermicides) can alter the body temperature or cervical secretions, making interpretation of these parameters unreliable.
- To increase effectiveness, you are advised to consult with trained professionals who are qualified to teach these methods.

cost

These methods cost nothing, except for the computerised fertility monitoring method, for which you need to purchase the monitor (around 100 euros) and the monthly sticks (around 10-15 euros) or the thermometer for measuring basal temperature.

withdrawal method

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

Due to its unsatisfactory level of effectiveness, it is not actually considered a birth control method by healthcare professionals, even though epidemiological data suggests it is one of the most commonly used methods of all



what it is

The withdrawal method, or 'coitus interruptus', consists of the man withdrawing his penis from the woman's vagina before ejaculation (the release of sperm). If sexual intercourse is to continue, the man must urinate and wash his genitals before continuing intercourse.

effectiveness

This is a fairly unsafe method: it is based on male behaviour and men are not always able to identify in time the exact moment they need to withdraw their penis from the vagina before ejaculation. In addition, sperm can be present in pre-ejaculate fluid. According to estimates, over the course of a year, 22 couples out of 100 using this method will get pregnant.

advantages

It does not require any advance preparation. It is free.

disadvantages

- It offers very limited effectiveness at preventing pregnancy.
- The sudden interruption of sexual intercourse can result in reduced pleasure for both partners.

LAM (Lactational Amenorrhea Method)

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

what it is

It is a birth control method based on the absence of periods during exclusive breastfeeding. Exclusively breastfeeding your baby (i.e. feeding your baby only breast milk) for the first six months is the best choice for the newborn's health and it also prevents pregnancy because it stops ovulation.

effectiveness

The LAM method is more effective than condoms at reducing the risk of pregnancy when used correctly, which is to say: your baby is under 6 months old, feeds exclusively on your breast milk at least every 4 hours during the day and every 6 hours through the night and menstrual bleeding lasting more than 1 day has not resumed after 9 weeks post-partum. In general, if you fail to follow all of these indications, the method is less effective.

what to do

With the LAM method, you feed your baby frequently and on demand, night and day. If feeds are less frequent than every 4 hours during the day or every 6 hours during the night, it is best to use an additional birth control method. You need to choose another method when: the baby starts complementary feeding in addition to your breast milk, or when your periods resume or when your baby is over 6 months old.

advantages

This method costs nothing and it favours extended breastfeeding, with all the associated health benefits for mother and baby.

disadvantages

- Some mothers might not feel ready to follow this approach to breastfeeding.



emergency contraception

it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases

After sexual intercourse that poses a risk of a sexually transmitted disease, you should contact your family doctor or family advisory service for any necessary tests



what it is

Emergency or 'morning-after' contraception is not for regular use, but is used to reduce the risk of pregnancy following unprotected or "unsafe" sexual intercourse, namely when:

- you have not used any birth control method;
- the condom has broken, slipped off or been used incorrectly;
- the withdrawal method failed and your partner did not manage to ejaculate outside your vagina;
- you use a natural birth control method and have miscalculated or failed to abstain from intercourse on your fertile days;
- you have used a birth control method incorrectly (e.g. forgotten a pill, been late with an injection or with insertion of the vaginal ring, etc.).

There are two methods available, and both must be used as soon as possible:

- insertion of a copper coil (IUD) up to 5 days after the intercourse or ovulation,
- oral contraception with a single dose of a prescription drug:
 - ulipristal acetate, which can be used up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex.
 - levonorgestrel, which can be used up to three days (72 hours) after unprotected sex.

If you are already pregnant, the 'morning-after pill' is completely ineffective and cannot cause a miscarriage.

what to do

For emergency contraception with ulipristal or levonorgestrel:

- if the woman is aged 18 years or older, no doctor's prescription is needed and the morning-after pill can be bought directly from a chemist's;
- women under 18 years of age need a doctor's prescription: in this case, they can contact their family advisory service, youth sexual health centre, family doctor, the hospital emergency gynaecology department or the out-of-hours on-call doctor (*guardia medica*).

**For the copper coil (IUD - Intrauterine Device):**

- you will need a doctor's prescription and a preliminary gynaecological examination. The device is inserted by the doctor in the surgery. You can contact your family advisory service or youth sexual health centre directly.

effectiveness

The morning-after pill works by preventing or delaying ovulation and it is estimated to be between 60% and 80% effective. The coil works mainly by preventing the fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus and it is very effective (95-99%).

advantages

Emergency oral contraception is easy to use and has no serious side effects.

The coil is the only effective method after ovulation and it offers both immediate and long-term contraception, also after emergency insertion.

disadvantages

- The morning-after pill is not effective during or after ovulation.
- Its effectiveness can decrease if you take other medication in the previous or following days.
- It does not give guaranteed results every time, so you are advised to take a pregnancy test if your period is more than 7 days late.
- Emergency contraception is not effective at preventing pregnancy if you have had or subsequently have unprotected sexual intercourse on other occasions during the month, so it is important to discuss your options with regard to starting long-term contraception with a healthcare professional.

cost

The cost of the pill ranges from 11 to 27 euros. The cost of the coil ranges from 40 to 70 euros.

permanent methods

they do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, so you need to use a condom as well

The birth control methods outlined in the previous pages of this booklet are all reversible: when you stop using them, their contraceptive effect ceases. The only permanent, irreversible birth control method is sterilisation.

male sterilisation vasectomy

This procedure consists of cutting or sealing the sperm ducts that carry sperm from the testicles, where sperm is produced, to the penis, from where it is subsequently ejaculated into the vagina. It is a surgical procedure carried out under anaesthetic, and both sperm ducts are cut and sealed. This method is **highly effective** (the risk of a pregnancy is around 1 in 1000), but it takes a few months before all sperm are totally eliminated. The absence of sperm must be confirmed by a semen test carried out some time after the operation. This procedure does not affect the man's sex drive or ability to enjoy sex.

In rare cases it can lead to local complications due to the surgical procedure.

female sterilisation tubal occlusion or ligation

This procedure consists of cutting, tying or sealing the fallopian tubes, where the eggs produced by the ovaries are fertilised by sperm before making their way to the uterus. It is a surgical procedure that involves tying or cutting both tubes to seal them, or inserting medical devices to block them. It can be carried out during an elective surgery with a small cut in your abdomen (a mini-laparotomy or a laparoscopy) or vaginally (a hysteroscopy), or during a caesarean section.

This method is **highly effective** (the risk of a pregnancy is around 5 in 1000) and you generally have contraceptive protection starting from your next period. In rare cases it can lead to local complications due to the surgical procedure.



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