

Fact Sheet

The Contraceptive Implant

What is the contraceptive implant?

The implant is a method of birth control that uses one type of hormone, a progestin, to prevent pregnancy. The implant is a rod the size and shape of a matchstick. It is made of soft plastic with the hormone inside. A health care provider uses a large needle to put the implant under the skin of a woman's upper arm. The hormone comes out in small amounts every day and works to prevent pregnancy for up to 3 years. The implant has a small amount of barium in it so that it can be seen with an x-ray.

How does the implant work?

The implant works by preventing ovulation (the release of an egg from a woman's ovary). It also makes the mucus in a woman's cervix (the opening to her uterus) thick, so that sperm cannot pass into the uterus to reach the egg. The implant also thins the lining of a woman's uterus so that an egg cannot attach and develop into a pregnancy.

How well does the implant work to prevent pregnancy?

The implant works very well to prevent pregnancy. If 100 women use the implant for one year less than one woman might get pregnant. It is one of the most effective methods of contraception.

What do women like about the implant?

- The implant is a very effective method of birth control.
- This method of birth control is reversible (not permanent).
- The implant is private (no one but you needs to know).
- You do not need to interrupt sex to use the implant.
- The implant can be removed at any time by a health care provider if a woman wants to become pregnant, or no longer wants to use the implant.
- You can usually get pregnant soon after the implant is taken out.
- Women who cannot use the hormone estrogen can use the implant.
- One implant prevents pregnancy for three years.
- Women who are breast feeding can use the implant 6 weeks after delivery.

What do women not like about the implant?

- The implant DOES NOT protect you from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- Almost all women who use the implant will have changes in their periods, like bleeding or spotting between periods, longer, heavier, or lighter periods. One out of five women will have no period while using the implant. Changes in monthly bleeding is the most common reason that women stop using the implant.
- An implant must be put in and taken out by a health care provider.
- If the implant is not put in correctly, sometimes it is difficult or impossible to remove.
- Certain medications may make the implant less effective at preventing pregnancy
- There is a greater chance of ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy in the fallopian tubes) if this method fails.

ABCD Family Planning

What are the possible side effects of using the implant?

- Changes in bleeding with your period
- Weight gain
- Headache
- Acne
- Breast pain or breast tenderness
- Changes in mood, nervousness, or depression
- Less desire for sex
- Stomach pain, cramps
- Vaginal infection or more vaginal discharge
- Back pain
- Nausea
- Pain where the implant is put in
- Feeling dizzy
- Serious allergic reactions

What are problems that might happen when the implant is put in or taken out?

- Pain, irritation, swelling or bruising
- Scarring, including a thick scar called a keloid
- Infection
- Implant breaks making it difficult to remove
- Scar tissue may make it difficult to remove
- The implant comes out on its own
- Very rarely, may need surgery in hospital to remove

Sometimes the implant can cause very serious health problems.

- ✓ **DO NOT** use the implant if you have any of the following:
 - Breast cancer currently or think you might have breast cancer
 - Are pregnant or think you might be pregnant
 - An allergy to the implant or any of its ingredients
 - An allergy to the medication used to numb the arm before the implant is put in or taken out
- ✓ Talk with your health care provider about whether the implant is safe for you if you have:
 - Liver disease or a liver tumor
 - Abnormal vaginal bleeding that has not been evaluated by a health care provider
 - Lupus
 - Breast cancer in the past

Return to the health center as soon as possible if you have any of the following:

- Pain in the chest, coughing blood, or sudden shortness of breath
- New or worse headaches
- New or worse depression
- Sudden dizziness, vomiting or fainting
- New pain in your leg
- New lump in your breast
- Changes in vision
- Very heavy vaginal bleeding
- Lower stomach pain
- Pain or bleeding that does not go away where the implant was put in or taken out
- You cannot feel the implant in your arm
- You think you might be pregnant

Contact your health care provider if you think you may have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or if you want to stop using the implant and start using another method.

- To decrease your risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), use a latex condom every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
- Emergency contraception (EC) prevents pregnancy when used no later than 3-5 days after unprotected sex. If you need EC or want more information, call your health care provider, family planning counselor, or pharmacist.