Birth Control Choices

Birth control is the use of any practices, methods, or devices to prevent pregnancy from happening in a sexually active woman.

Below are some birth control choices to help avoid pregnancy.

- **Abstinence** is the surest form of birth control. This requires self-control. There is no risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or AIDS.
- **Periodic abstinence** requires self-control during certain times of the month.
  - Calendar method, timing your menstrual periods from month to month.
  - Ovulation method is avoiding sexual intercourse around the time you produce an egg (*ovulate*).
  - Symptotherm method is avoiding sexual intercourse at the time of ovulation, using a thermometer and ovulation symptoms.
  - Post ovulation method is the timing of sexual intercourse after you ovulated.

  These methods do not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Birth control pills (*BCPs*)** contain estrogen and progesterone hormone. These medicines work by stopping the egg from forming in the ovary (*ovulation*). BCPs are prescribed by a caregiver who will ask you questions about the risks of taking BCP. BCPs do not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **"Minipill"** birth control pills have only the progesterone hormone. They are taken every day of each month and must be prescribed by your caregiver. They do not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Emergency contraception** is often call "the morning after pill." This pill can be taken right after sex or up to five days after sex, if you think your birth control failed, you failed to use contraception, or you were forced to have sex. It is most effective the sooner you take the pills after having sexual intercourse. **Do not** use emergency contraception as your only form of birth control. Emergency contraceptive pills are available without a prescription. Check with your pharmacist.
- **Condoms** are a thin sheath of latex, synthetic, or lambskin worn over the penis during sexual intercourse. They can have a spermicide in or on them when you buy them. Latex condoms can prevent pregnancy and STDs. "Natural" or lambskin condoms can prevent pregnancy but may not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Female condoms** are a soft, loose-fitting sheath that is put into the vagina before sexual intercourse. They can prevent pregnancy and STDs, including AIDS.
- **Sponge** is a soft, circular piece of polyurethane foam with spermicide in it that is inserted into the vagina after wetting it, and before sexual intercourse. It does not require a prescription from your caregiver. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Diaphragm** is a soft, latex, dome-shaped barrier that must be fitted by a caregiver. It is inserted into the vagina, along with a spermicidal jelly. After the proper fitting for a diaphragm, always insert the diaphragm before intercourse. The diaphragm should be left in the vagina for 6 to 8 hours after intercourse. Removal and reinsertion with a spermicide is always necessary after any use. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Hormonal injections** are given every 3 months to prevent pregnancy. These injections contain synthetic progesterone and no estrogen. This hormone stops the ovaries from releasing eggs. It also causes the cervical mucus to thicken and changes the uterine lining. This makes it harder for sperm to survive in the uterus. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Birth Control Patch (Ortho-Evra)** contains hormones similar to those in birth control pills, so effectiveness, risks and side effects are similar. It must be changed once a week and is prescribed by a caregiver. It is less effective in very overweight women. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Vaginal Ring (NuvaRing)** contains hormones similar to those in birth control pills. It is left in place for 3 weeks, removed for 1 week, and then a new one is put back into the vagina. It comes with a timer to put in your purse to help you remember when to take it out or put a new one in. A caregiver's examination and prescription is necessary, just like with birth control pills and the patch. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Lunelle** is an estrogen and progesterone hormone injection that is given every 28 to 30 days. It can be given

in the upper arm, thigh, or buttocks. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.

- **Intrauterine device (IUD): copper T or progestin filled** is a T-shaped device that is put in a woman's uterus, during a menstrual period, to prevent pregnancy. The copper T IUD can last 10 years, and the progestin IUD can last 5 years. The progestin IUD can also help control heavy menstrual periods. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS. The copper T IUD can be used as emergency contraception, if inserted within 5 days of having unprotected intercourse.
- **Norplant** is 6 small plastic tubes filled with a progestin. These tubes are inserted on the inside of the upper arm. It stops the ovary from ovulating, changes the lining of the uterus, and thickens the cervical mucus to block sperm from going into the cervix and uterus. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Cervical cap** is a round, soft latex or plastic cup that fits over the cervix and must be fitted by a caregiver. You do not need to use a spermicide with it or remove and insert it every time you have sexual intercourse. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Spermicides** are chemicals that kill or block sperm from entering the cervix and uterus. They come in the form of creams, jellies, suppositories, foam, or tablets, and they do not need a prescription. They are inserted into the vagina with an applicator before having sexual intercourse. This must be repeated every time you have sexual intercourse.
- **Withdrawal** is using the method of the male withdrawing his penis from sexual intercourse before he has a climax and deposits his sperm. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Female tubal ligation** is when the woman's fallopian tubes are surgically sealed or tied to prevent the egg from traveling to the uterus. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.
- **Male sterilization** is when the male has his tubes that carry sperm tied off (*vasectomy*) to stop sperm from entering the vagina during sexual intercourse. It does not protect against STDs or AIDS.

Regardless of which method of birth control you choose, it is still important that you use some form of protection against STDs.

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