

Contraception

pill

ring

implant

intra-uterine device

patch

condom



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INTRODUCTION

This brochure came about thanks to the shared desire on the part of the staff of the Family Planning centres to provide information on various methods of contraception. The intention is to make this information accessible to the widest possible number of women and men, regardless of their origin, culture and/or religion.

These days there is a wide array of contraceptives available on the market. This brief text provides a simple, concise overview of the various methods of contraception, in order to allow each person to make an informed and responsible choice.

Couples today are free to decide whether or not to have a large family, thanks to contraception. This is what is referred to as family planning: the ability of a couple to plan the birth of children using a method of contraception.

In Belgium, family planning centres work with an interdisciplinary team (gynaecologists, social workers, lawyers, psychologists and sex therapists) in order to ensure a holistic treatment of each woman, man and/or couple.

As such, the centres are devoted specifically to the areas of prevention, advice and follow-up on any question concerning relationships and sexuality.

It is therefore always best to turn to a professional in order to obtain correct answers rather than rely on the rumours that circulate with regard to contraception.



The birth control pill does NOT make you put on weight, and it does NOT render you sterile. There is no need to take a break from taking it each year, the intra-uterine device (coil) does NOT reach up to the heart, and does NOT go through the fallopian tubes.

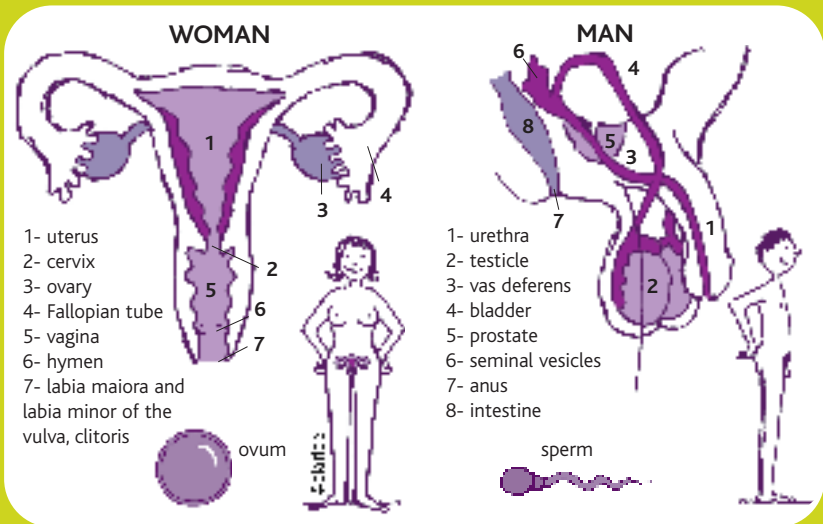


NOTE: it is important to remember that an annual visit to your doctor is necessary for a pap smear test to check that everything is going well and to get your new contraceptive prescription.

THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE



- The menstrual cycle refers to the set of physiological and hormonal phenomena that take place between the first day of menstruation and the last day preceding the next menstrual period.
- Mostly the **cycle lasts 28 days** but some women have a shorter or longer cycle (between 23 and 35 days) or may even be completely irregular.
- During the first days of the cycle, an **ovum matures in one of the ovaries. The mature ovum, or egg, is released into the Fallopian tube and moves toward the uterus. This is ovulation.**
- During the next 14 days, the ovary produces a hormone that prepares the lining of the uterus for implantation of the egg if it is fertilised by a sperm.
- If the egg is not fertilised, the preparation of the uterus becomes useless, and is discarded at the end of this 14 day period. This causes a greater or lesser amount of bleeding through the vagina. This is **menstruation**.



FORMS OF CONTRACEPTION



The condom

How does it work?

- The condom is a sort of cap made of thin latex, that is rolled over the **erect penis** before sexual intercourse. Its tip has a little reservoir to collect the **sperm**.
- A female condom also exists, known as Femidon, but its use is much less frequent and it is much more expensive. It is placed inside the vagina.
- The condom prevents the sperm from entering the vagina.

How to use it

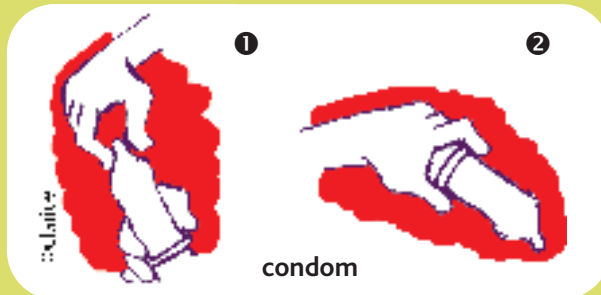
- 1) When unrolling the male condom over the penis, the little reservoir should be held between the fingers to prevent air from getting inside (balloon effect).
- 2) After ejaculation, when it is removed, the condom should be held at the base. This prevents the sperm from escaping.

Note

- *The condom is a very effective method if it is used correctly.*
- *A new condom must be used each time you have sexual intercourse.*
- *If the condom is used as the sole means of contraception, it is advised to have a "morning-after pill" at hand, in case the condom should break or remain stuck inside the vagina.*



For both women and men, the condom is also the only effective means of protection against Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs – gonorrhoea, AIDS, chlamydia, hepatitis B, syphilis).



The contraceptive pill



How does it work?

- The pill contains a low dose of hormones. Taken daily for 21 days (3 weeks), **it prevents ovulation.**
- A woman who takes the pill has her menstrual period each month but without ovulation.

How to use it?

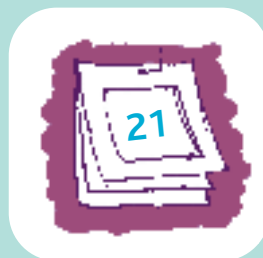
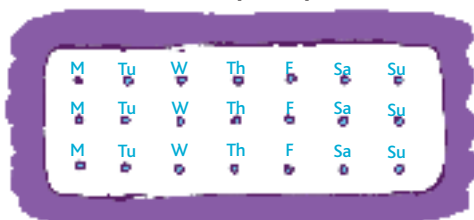
- 1) The first time you take the pill, you should take it on the **first day of the menstrual period.**
- 2) **For 3 weeks** (21 days), one pill is taken each day around the same time.
- 3) **When a packet of pills is finished, that is, after 3 weeks, stop taking them for 1 week and menstruation will generally start at that point.**
- 4) After the week is over, start a new packet, even if you still have some bleeding.

For instance, if you start a packet on a Monday and take a pill every day for 3 weeks, that means you will take the last pill on a Sunday; stop for a week and start a new packet the Monday after that, and so on.

Note

- *The pill is a very effective method if used correctly (not forgetting to take it, vigilance in case of vomiting or diarrhoea).*
- *You can have sexual intercourse without risk of pregnancy even during the week when not taking it.*
- *It is best not to stop taking the pill all of a sudden, for instance if your partner is away on a trip.*
- *If you decide to stop taking the pill, wait until the end of a packet.*
- *The pill does not make you sterile.*

contraceptive pill

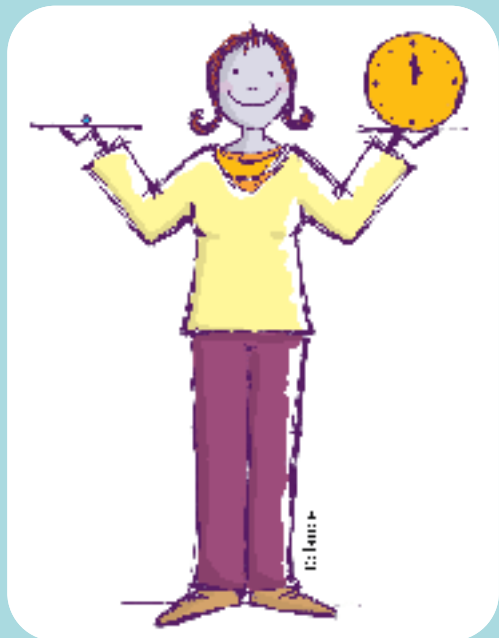




What to do if you have forgotten to take your pill?

- If no more than 12 hours has passed since you forgot to take it, take it right away and continue as usual. The pill will continue to be effective.
- However, if it has been more than 12 hours since you forgot to take it, the pill will no longer be effective and so there is a risk of pregnancy if you have sexual intercourse. Continue taking the remaining pills in the packet, but to protect yourself against unwanted pregnancy, use condoms as well for 7 days following the time when you forgot to take it.
- If you forgot to take one pill, the best solution is to go on with the following day's pill.

For example: you take the pill every night around 10 p.m. If you forget, you can take it up to 10 a.m. the next day; there is no reason to worry. However, if you only realise you forgot to take it the next afternoon, the effectiveness of the pill is no longer guaranteed (+ 36 hours after forgetting to take it). In that case, it is best to continue taking the pills in the packet, while taking other precautions (condom, morning-after pill).



The patch



How does it work?

- The patch is a little square of around 4 cm that is pasted on the skin.
- It releases hormones equivalent to those in the pill through the skin.

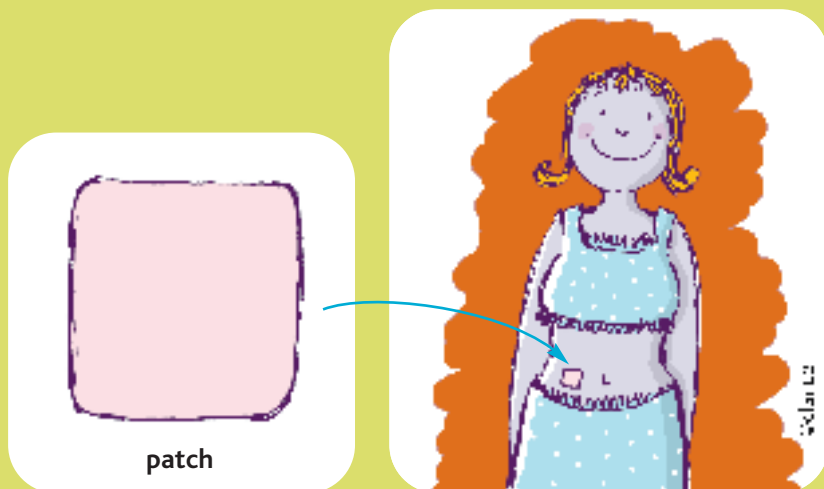
How to use it?

- The first time you put on a patch, you must do so on **the first day of your menstrual period** and for the first 7 days. It is best to use a condom as well.
- The patch is placed on the arm, the buttock or the abdomen and left there for **1 week. The patch does not stick to the breasts or to any zone with hair.**
- At the end of the week, remove the patch and place a new one on another spot.

- 1) One patch should be used per week **during three weeks.**
- 2) Then stop wearing a patch during 1 week, and menstruation will generally start at that point.
- 3) After the week, apply a new patch, even if you still have some bleeding.

Note

- *The patch is a very effective method if used correctly.*
- *You can have sexual intercourse without risk of pregnancy, even during the week when you are not wearing it.*





The vaginal ring

How does it work?

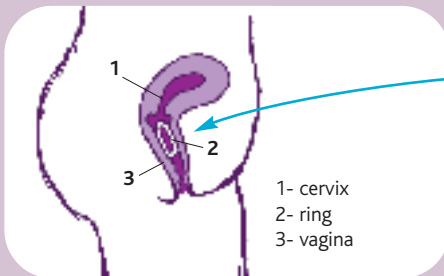
- The vaginal ring is a thin, flexible and transparent ring of about 5 cm in diameter, which is placed inside the vagina.
- Body heat causes the ring to release hormones equivalent to those of the pill during 3 weeks.

How to use it?

- 1) The first time you insert a ring, you should do so on the **first day of your menstrual period** and during the first 7 days. It is a good idea to use a condom as well.
- 2) A woman can insert the ring in her vagina herself, and should leave it in for 3 weeks.
- 3) It should then be removed and not worn for 1 week, and menstruation generally begins at that point.
- 4) After the week is over, insert a new ring even you still have some bleeding.

Note

- *The ring is a very effective method if used correctly.*
- *You can have sexual intercourse without risk of pregnancy, even during the week you are not wearing it.*
- *The ring can be removed for rinsing in cold water – never in warm water – and then reinserted.*
- *The ring can also be removed during sexual intercourse if it is bothersome, for a maximum of 3 hours.*



The quarterly injection



How does it work?

This is an intra-muscular injection that has to be given every three months and that contains a fairly high dose of hormones.

How to use it?

- 1) The first time, the injection should be given between **the 1st and the 5th day of the menstrual period.**
- 2) Thereafter, a new injection will have to be given within **12 weeks (3 months)** following the first injection.

Note

This method is effective, but can have some disadvantages:

- *The injection may interfere with menstruation: lack of menstruation, heavy or more frequent menstruation, continuous minor bleeding.*
- *When you stop the injections, the return of regular ovulation can sometimes take several months. This will cause problems in moving to another form of contraception and therefore can, in certain cases, lead to unwanted pregnancy. As well, women who stop receiving the injections because they want to get pregnant sometimes have to wait a certain length of time.*
- *The injection can lead to weight gain, depending on one's dietary habits. In certain cases, this gain can be quite substantial.*





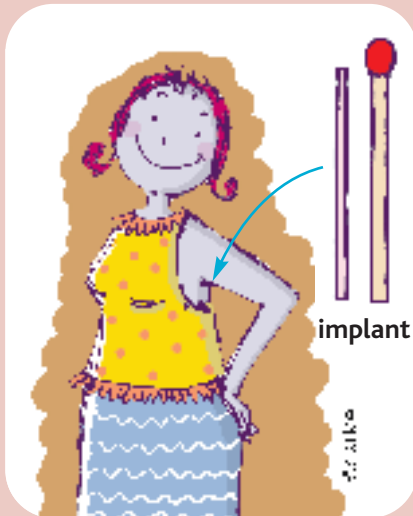
The implant

How does it work?

- The implant is a small flexible plastic rod the size of a matchstick that the doctor inserts **under the skin of the upper arm**. Once it has been inserted, it is invisible but can be felt when pressing on the skin.
- The implant contains a hormone that is released gradually and serves to block ovulation.

How to use it?

- 1) The implant is inserted by the doctor between the **1st and the 5th day of the menstrual period**.
- 2) The implant is effective immediately after insertion, and for a maximum of three years. It can, of course, be removed at any time.



Note

- This method is effective but can sometimes have some disadvantages: absence of menstruation, weight gain, increase in acne or hair growth
- The cycle returns immediately upon withdrawal of the implant.



The intra-uterine device (IUD, or coil)

How does it work?

- An intra-uterine device (IUD) is a small, flexible plastic object with a string at the end, which is placed in the uterus. There are two kinds of IUD: copper coils or IUDs that release a hormone.
- The presence of an IUD prevents implantation of a fertilised ovum in the uterus, by causing a change in the lining of the uterus.

How to use it?

- 1) It is inserted by a doctor, generally during the **final days of the menstrual period, for a period of 3 to 5 years** (depending on the type of IUD).
- 2) The IUD is effective immediately after being inserted. It can, of course, be removed at any time.

Note

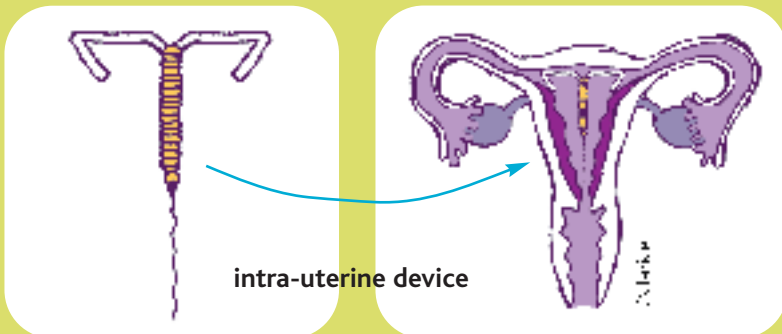
No need to think about contraception on a daily basis.

- *Initially, you may experience some abdominal pain, since the uterus contracts in response to the presence of the foreign object. Generally the pain disappears quickly and the uterus gets used to this little piece of plastic.*
- *If one uses a copper IUD, menstrual bleeding may be a little heavier.*
- *If you use a hormonal IUD, menstrual bleeding will decrease or even stop entirely.*
- *The string on the IUD should be trimmed in order to ensure it does not disturb the woman or her partner.*
- **If you have an IUD, it is absolutely essential to have a medical check-up once a year.**



What to look out for?

- If you wish, you can feel the string on the IUD with your finger, at the back of the vagina, to check it is in place. It can sometimes happen that the uterus expels the IUD without you noticing it. The best time to check if it is in place is right after the menstrual period.
- In case of discharge of an odd colour or unpleasant odour, itching, urinary problems or abdominal pain, you are advised to quickly consult a doctor, since there is increased risk of infection caused by the IUD.



FORMS OF CONTRACEPTION FOR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS



Three months after giving birth

There are several contraceptive methods that can be used after giving birth:

- **Condom:** this method can be used without any difficulty after giving birth.
- **Intra-uterine device (coil):** this can be inserted around 6 weeks after giving birth, even if breast-feeding.
- **Pill, ring, patch:** the pill/contraceptive ring/patch should be used again 30 days after giving birth. If breast-feeding, a form of contraception should be used that does not affect the breast milk, such as the mini-pill or the implant.
- **Implant:** can be inserted at any time after giving birth.
- **Tubal ligation:** women who do not wish to have any more children can ask for a tubal ligation (tying of the Fallopian tubes). It is currently recommended to wait a few months after giving birth before having this procedure (the method is irreversible).



During breast-feeding

- Breast-feeding (nursing) sometimes delays the return of menstruation, but there is nonetheless a risk of getting pregnant just before that time.
- Even if breast-feeding, some form of contraception that does not have an effect on breast milk should be used, such as the mini-pill, an implant or the IUD (coil).



Before menopause

- Women stop having periods around the age of 50. Their cycle gradually becomes irregular before stopping entirely. During this time of transition, the use of a means of contraception remains necessary, since there is still a risk of getting pregnant.
- One year after the definitive end of menstruation, contraception can be stopped, upon a doctor's advice. The doctor may prescribe something to diminish the typical discomforts caused by menopause, such as hot flashes, palpitations, depression, vaginal dryness, etc.
- Even after the definitive end of menstruation, women need to continue to see the doctor once a year for certain check-ups such as breast exams (mammograms) and tests for cervical cancer. This annual check-up is necessary throughout one's life.



QUESTIONABLE METHODS



First of all, it is important to remember that being a virgin is no protection against getting pregnant. In fact, if sperm gets into the entrance to the vagina, even if there is no penetration the sperm have no problem finding their way to fertilising the ovum.

Coitus interruptus (the withdrawal method)

- Coitus interruptus, or the withdrawal of the penis before ejaculation, is not an effective method.
- In fact, even if the man withdraws before ejaculation, there has already been some emission of sperm, and therefore a risk of pregnancy.
- Moreover, practising the withdrawal method may cause difficulties in the couple's sex life.

Periodic abstinence

(also known as the calendar, the temperature or the mucus method)

- Some women try to calculate the days on which they are fertile. By avoiding these times of risk, they hope to prevent pregnancy. These methods are not effective forms of contraception because the length of a woman's cycle and the ovulation period are very unpredictable.
- On the other hand, these methods can be useful to help get pregnant when this is desired.

Vaginal douche

- Washing the vagina after sexual intercourse does not prevent pregnancy. Sperm move very quickly: they are already at the base of the uterus by the time a woman begins to wash herself.
- Soap also destroys certain natural defences in the vagina. Washing often with soap can cause irritation and may increase the chance of fungal infection.

THE MORNING-AFTER PILL



- What to do if one has had sexual relations without contraception or if the contraceptive failed (broken condom, forgotten pill, etc.)? There is the possibility of **emergency contraception**. The "morning-after" pill can be taken in the hours following sexual intercourse.
- The morning-after pill cannot be used on a regular basis; it should be reserved for exceptional circumstances.
- This emergency contraceptive method takes the form of a pill containing a hormone (progesterone), to be swallowed as soon as possible (the soo-



ner, the more effective) after unprotected sexual intercourse or after a failure of a contraceptive, and maximum 72 hours after intercourse took place.

- However, this pill does not always work. If you do not get your menstrual period two weeks after taking it, it is a good idea to take a pregnancy test.
- **This is simply a solution after the fact and does not protect you in the case of subsequent sexual relations.**
- **If you are under 21 years of age, the cost of the pill will be fully refunded to you if on a doctor's prescription (very soon it will be free for everyone).** You can also obtain it from a family planning centre.



STERILISATION

This method is permanent. It is one that may be considered when one is certain of not wanting any more children.

How does it work?

- Sterilisation is possible for men (vasectomy) and for women (tubal ligation).
- In the case of men, the procedure prevents the sperm from entering the semen.
- In the case of women, the procedure prevents sperm from reaching the ovum.
- In both men and women, **sterilisation does not affect the hormonal balance.** Sexual potency remains intact. After sterilisation, the man ejaculates semen as before; however, the semen no longer contains any sperm. Similarly, after sterilisation a woman continues to have regular menstrual periods.

What does the sterilisation procedure involve?

FOR WOMEN	FOR MEN
<i>Short-term hospitalisation (often just one day).</i>	<i>No hospitalisation necessary.</i>
<i>Mostly under general anaesthetic.</i>	<i>Local anaesthetic.</i>
<i>Closes off the channels through which the ova circulate (Fallopian tubes).</i>	<i>Closes the channels through which the sperm pass.</i>
<i>Immediately effective.</i>	<i>Effective after 3 to 6 months.</i>



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Family Planning centre seeks first and foremost to be a place where you can come to talk and to be listened to.

In every region there is a Family Planning centre you can turn to for a variety of services:

- **social and legal services**
- **psychological services and sometimes sex therapy**
- **medical service (gynaecology)**
- **assistance, prevention & various activities...**

Prices are set by law or determined based on income, in order to make sure the service is open to everyone and that financial considerations do not present an obstacle to those wishing to consult them.

It can happen at any time that someone forgets a contraceptive, uses it incorrectly or fails to understand it. As a result, a woman may find herself pregnant without wishing to be at that particular point in her life.

In such a case, family planning centres also offer assistance and follow-up regarding an undesired pregnancy.

Either the centres themselves perform abortions, or they offer consultation and a listening ear, and can provide information about centres that perform abortions.

In Belgium there are two methods for terminating a pregnancy:

- a drug-based method (RU486 pill) is possible before the 7th week of pregnancy.
- a method using suction aspiration is possible between 7 and 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for any additional information.

Planning Marolles

21 rue de la Roue à 1000 Bruxelles

02/511 29 90 • planningmarolles@hotmail.com

Groupe Santé Josaphat

70 rue Royale Sainte-Marie à 1030 Bruxelles

02/241 76 71 • centre@planningjosaphat.org

"Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race."

James Grant, UNICEF Annual Report 2000

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Family planning and abortion

Fédération Laïque de Centres de Planning Familial (FLCPF)

34 rue de la Tulipe
1050 Bruxelles
02/502 82 03
<http://www.planningfamilial.net>

Groupe d'Action des Centres Extrahospitaliers pratiquant l'Avortement (GACEHPA)

34 rue de la Tulipe
1050 Bruxelles
02/502 72 07

AIDS And STD Prevention

Centre Elisa

(Free and anonymous HIV testing)
290 rue Haute
1000 Bruxelles
02/535 30 03

SIREAS

22 rue de la Croix
1050 Bruxelles
02/649 99 58

Information on genital mutilation

Gams

11 rue Brialmont
1210 Bruxelles
02/219 43 40

Information on homosexuality

EX ÆQUO

02/736 28 61
www.exaequo.be

Tels quels

81 rue du Marché au Charbon
1000 Bruxelles
02/502 00 70
www.telsquels.be

Rights

Infor justice

9 avenue de Fré
1180 Bruxelles
02/37510 06

Prostitution

Espace P

116 rue des Plantes
1030 Bruxelles
02/219 98 74
www.espacep.be

Avec la collaboration :

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