Facts About: Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC): IUD



What is a Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive (LARC): IUD?

An Intrauterine Device (IUD) is a small T-shaped device made of soft, flexible plastic.

A trained provider places the IUD into the uterus. There are two types: one made with copper (it contains no hormones) and one made with hormones similar to the birth control pill.

The copper IUD works by causing the uterine lining to change, and makes the sperm move slowly, preventing fertilization of the egg. It can be used for up to 10 years.

The hormonal IUD (which can be used up to 8 years) works in three ways. 1) It keeps the body from releasing an egg that could be fertilized by a man's sperm, 2) it also causes changes to the cervical mucus making it more difficult for sperm to enter the uterus and 3) keeps a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus.

Brands:
Kyleena can be used for up to 5 years
Liletta can be used for up to 8 years
Mirena can be used for up to 8 years
Paragard (copper) can be used for up to 10 years

How well do IUDs work?

The IUD is one of the most effective forms of reversible birth control available. All IUDs are 99% effective in preventing pregnancy. Over the long term, IUDs are more effective than birth control pills, the patch or the ring.

Why is an IUD a good choice for me?

- No one can tell that you are using birth control and it does not interfere with sex or daily activities.
- It can be inserted immediately after a miscarriage, childbirth and while breastfeeding or after pregnancy has been ruled out.
- All women, including adolescents, can get an IUD, even if they have never had children.
- If you wish to become pregnant or if you want to stop using it, you can have the IUD removed.
- The hormonal IUD may help to decrease menstrual pain and heavy menstrual bleeding.

How are IUDs inserted?

A doctor or nurse practitioner inserts and removes the IUD. The provider will review your medical history and will perform a pelvic exam. To insert the IUD, the provider uses a slender plastic tube to place the IUD into the vagina and guide it through the cervix into the uterus. The tube is removed, leaving the IUD in place.

How do you use an IUD?

After the IUD is put in, you do not need to do anything when you have sex. The only thing you need to do is check once a month after your period to make sure the IUD's string is in place.

To check your string:

1. Wash your hands.
2. Squat down or stand with one foot on the toilet.
3. Put your index or middle finger high into your vagina and find your cervix. The cervix is the opening to your uterus (womb). It will feel firm, like the end of your nose.
4. Feel for the string. It will feel small and you may need to ask the nurse practitioner or doctor to help you practice before you leave.
5. If you can feel the string, don't do anything.
6. If you cannot feel the string or you are not sure the IUD is in the right place, call your doctor or clinic and use another kind of birth control until your doctor or nurse practitioner can examine you.

Will I have any problems if I use an IUD?

Most women do not have many problems using an IUD. You may have some spotting or irregular bleeding, headaches, nausea, breast tenderness, depression or mood changes, or acne. If using a hormonal IUD and signs or symptoms of a pelvic infection develop such as severe pain, excessive bleeding, fever, etc., call your doctor or clinic.

Smoking increases your risk of serious side effects. Women who use birth control methods with hormones should not smoke. This includes electronic cigarettes.

Copper IUD: Some women may have some cramping and bleeding. The cramping and bleeding may decrease within 1 year of use.

Remember:

- IUDs do not protect you from STIs (sexually transmitted infections) or HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), which you can get when you have sex. To protect yourself, use a latex or vinyl condom every time you have oral, vaginal or anal sex.
- Backup contraception may be needed for hormonal IUDs, depending on the time of insertion.

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