

# Intrauterine Contraception or Intrauterine Device (IUD)



*“I was planning to get my tubes tied after my last baby. Instead I got a copper IUD. Now I can change my mind if I want.”*

*“My periods were so heavy and painful before I got the hormonal IUD. Now I have no pain and very light bleeding.”*

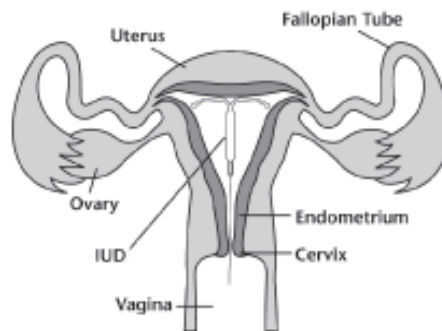
– Kaiser Permanente members

An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small T-shaped object that is placed into the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

There are two choices for intrauterine contraception in the United States:

- The copper IUD is made of plastic and is partially covered by copper. One brand name is Paragard.
- The hormonal IUD is made of plastic and contains the hormone levonorgestrel, a form of progestin. One brand name is Mirena.

## The IUD in Place in the Uterus



## How does the IUD work? Does it cause abortions?

Neither the hormonal IUD nor the copper IUD works by causing an abortion. The copper IUD immobilizes and kills sperm so fertilization of the egg is prevented. The hormonal IUD releases a small amount of levonorgestrel hormone every day. This causes thickening of the cervical mucus and prevents sperm from getting into the uterus so fertilization is prevented. The hormonal IUD also causes the lining of the uterus to become thinner, preventing pregnancy.

## How effective are IUDs?

Both types of IUDs are more than 99 percent effective. The copper IUD is effective for up to 10 years and the hormonal IUD is effective for 5 years.

## Is intrauterine contraception safe?

Yes. IUDs are safe when inserted properly. The best candidates to consider IUDs are women who:

- Are seeking highly effective, long-term, reversible contraception.
- Are not at risk for getting a sexually transmitted infection.
- Are not recovering from a pelvic infection within the last three months.

- Are not seeking to become pregnant for at least one year or more.
- If they had a baby, are at least four weeks past the time they gave birth.

## What are the advantages of using an IUD?

- **Convenience:** There is nothing you need to remember.
- **Effectiveness:** The IUD is more than 99 percent effective. It is ideal for women who want long-term birth control but are unsure about getting permanent sterilization.
- **Reversible:** The IUD can easily be removed if another pregnancy is desired. The IUD does not change a woman’s fertility or her chances of getting pregnant once it is removed.
- **Non-contraceptive benefits:** The hormonal IUD can also be used to reduce menstrual bleeding, decrease the risk of anemia, reduce menstrual cramps or pelvic pain, reduce the risk of some cancers, and serve as post-menopausal progestin therapy.
- **Control over your own body:** Some women are pressured to have sex or get pregnant when they don’t want to, and some partners may interfere with birth control or refuse to wear a condom. The IUD provides a safe, private, and effective choice.

## What are the disadvantages of an IUD?

- Some women have spotting (light bleeding) for several weeks after insertion. This is normal during the first six weeks with both types of IUDs. Spotting may occur for several months with the hormonal IUD.

- There may be mild to moderate cramps at the time of insertion. Taking ibuprofen before insertion may be helpful.
- With the copper IUD, menstrual bleeding may become heavier, last longer, and cause an increase in cramps.

## How do I get an IUD?

Your Ob-Gyn doctor or nurse practitioner can insert an IUD into your uterus at an office visit. Before the insertion, you will have a pelvic exam. If needed, you will have a Pap test and cultures to make sure you have no infections. These can be done on the same day that the IUD is inserted.

## Will I feel the IUD?

No. Both types of IUDs are very soft and flexible so women and their partners should not feel your IUD at all. Since it is placed inside the uterus, you should not feel it during sex or during normal activities, including exercise (such as swimming, running, or aerobics). You are also able to use pads or tampons during your period as usual. If you have pain during sex, you should notify your medical professional so you can have your IUD checked. It is a good idea to check for the string of your IUD after your periods. If the string is missing or longer than before, call your provider.

## Will my partner feel the IUD?

No. Neither you nor your partner should feel the IUD during sex. The string of the IUD is thin, soft, and flexible. It stays high up in your vagina so your partner usually does not feel the string.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

## Can an IUD cause an ectopic pregnancy?

No. The IUD is so effective in preventing pregnancy that there is less risk of having an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy than in women using no method of birth control.

## Does the IUD cause infections like pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)?

No. PID is associated with couples who have multiple sexual partners or are at risk for getting sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydia. Women without these risk factors have a lower risk of getting PID with an IUD, and the risk decreases the longer the IUD is in place. There are studies showing that the copper or hormone in an IUD may protect against getting PID. Even if you have a history of chlamydia or gonorrhea, had an infection in your uterus, or had PID more than three months ago, an IUD may still be a good choice for you.

## Can I still get pregnant after removal of an IUD?

Yes. Your chances of getting pregnant after removal of an IUD are the same as for a woman who has not been using any method of birth control. You can get pregnant immediately after removal of your IUD.

## Does the IUD cause cancer?

No. In fact, the hormone in the hormonal IUD may decrease your risk for endometrial (uterine) cancer by making you bleed less during your period.

## Do I have to have children before I can get an IUD?

No. However, women who have not had a child do have a slightly higher chance of expelling the IUD and may have pain with insertion. Once you have had a child, your uterus is a little larger and can accommodate the IUD better.

## Can I get an IUD if I had an ectopic pregnancy?

Yes. The IUD does not increase your risk of another ectopic pregnancy.

## Can I get an IUD after a pregnancy termination (abortion)?

Yes. There is no higher risk of infection after either first or second trimester pregnancy termination. Please tell your doctor if you would like an IUD immediately after a pregnancy termination.

## Other resources

- Visit your doctor's home page at [kp.org/mydoctor](http://kp.org/mydoctor) to use online health tools, view your Preventive Services reminders, check most lab results, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, or if your partner interferes with your birth control, this can cause stress and may seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233