How does the IUD work?
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 IUD are more than 99 percent effective. The copper IUD is effective for up to 10 years and the hormonal IUD is effective for up to 5 years.

How soon after being inserted does the IUD prevent pregnancy?
If the hormonal IUD is placed within the first 7 days of your period or you are using another hormonal contraceptive when the hormonal IUD is inserted, it will be effective immediately after insertion. If it is inserted at other times, backup contraception is recommended for 7 days.

Are IUDs safe?
Yes, IUDs have an excellent safety record. Practice safer sex to minimize the risk of getting an STD.

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.
• Reversible: The IUD can easily be removed when and 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 also reduces menstrual bleeding, decreases the risk of anemia, reduces menstrual cramps and pelvic pain, reduces the risk of endometrial cancer, and can serve as postmenopausal 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 birth control choice.

What are the disadvantages of an IUD?
• There may be mild to moderate cramps at the time of insertion. Taking ibuprofen before insertion may be helpful.
A small number of women may experience an infection after placement or have the IUD poke through the uterus. Both of these are extremely uncommon occurrences.

Some women have spotting (light bleeding) for several weeks to months 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.

With the copper IUD, menstrual bleeding may become heavier, last longer, and cause an increase in cramps. This improves over time.

In the very rare case that a woman gets pregnant while using the IUD, she has an increased chance of having a tubal (ectopic) pregnancy.

How do I get an IUD?
Your Ob-Gyn doctor or nurse practitioner can insert an IUD into your uterus at an office visit. Your provider will ask you questions and do a test to make sure you are not pregnant. A small instrument called a speculum is used to gently spread the walls of the vagina and reveal the cervix. The IUD is then placed through your cervix into your uterus using a thin tube.

Will I feel the IUD?
No. Both types of IUD are very soft and flexible so you should not feel the IUD at all. You can 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 period. 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. If your partner is bothered by the string, it can be trimmed shorter or even tucked away inside your cervix.

Does the IUD cause infections like pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)?
No. PID is associated with sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydia. There are studies showing that the hormonal 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 be a good choice for you.

Can I still get pregnant after removal of an IUD?
Yes. Once the IUD is removed, you become able to get pregnant quickly, and your chances of becoming pregnant are the same as those of other women your age.

Do I have to have children before I can get an IUD?
No. Women who have not been pregnant before can get an IUD.

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.

Other resources
• Visit your doctor’s home page at kp.org/mydoctor to use online health tools, view your Preventive Services reminders, check most lab results, and much more.
• Check out our birth control navigator at kp.org/mydoctor/birthcontrol. Sort and compare methods based on effectiveness and convenience.
• 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 or connect to ndvh.org.

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.

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