An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small, plastic T-shaped birth control device. It's placed into the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

The most common types in the U.S. are the:
- Copper IUD (common brand: Paragard)
- Hormonal IUD (common brand: Mirena, which contains levonorgestrel, a type of progestin)

The copper IUD lasts up to 12 years. The hormonal IUD lasts about 3 to 8 years.

How does the IUD work?
Both IUD types prevent sperm from fertilizing eggs.

The copper IUD stops sperm movement and kills sperm.

The hormonal IUD releases a small amount of hormones daily, which makes the cervical mucus thicker and blocks sperm from reaching the egg. Also, the lining of the uterus gets thinner and less able to sustain pregnancy.

How soon does the IUD prevent pregnancy?
The copper IUD is effective as soon as it's placed in your uterus.

The hormonal IUD works immediately if you get it either during the first 7 days of your period or while using other hormonal birth control.

If you get a hormonal IUD at other times in your cycle, we recommend using another birth control method for 7 days.

Are IUDs safe?
Yes, IUDs have an excellent safety record. Practice safer sex using condoms to protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

What are the advantages of using an IUD?
Using an IUD is:
- Convenient. There's nothing you need to remember.
- Effective. It works more than 99 percent of the time.
- Reversible. Your clinician removes your IUD if you want to have a child. An IUD doesn't make it harder to get pregnant after it's removed.

- Private. Some women are pressured to have sex or get pregnant. Their partners may refuse to wear a condom or stop them from using birth control. The IUD is a private, safe choice that gives a woman control over her body.

Also, the hormonal IUD reduces menstrual bleeding and risks of anemia, menstrual cramps, pelvic pain, and endometrial cancer. It can also be used for hormonal (progestin) therapy after menopause.

What are the disadvantages of an IUD?
When using an IUD, some women might have:
- Mild to moderate cramps when it's inserted. Taking ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) before and after insertion may help.
- Uterine infection or injury, although very unlikely.
- Light bleeding (spotting) for several weeks to months after insertion. This is normal for 6 weeks with both types of IUDs. It may continue longer with a hormonal IUD.
Menstrual bleeding that’s heavier and lasts longer with the copper IUD. Also, cramps can be stronger. These usually go away over time.

Higher risk of tubal (ectopic) pregnancy, although pregnancy is rare in women with IUDs.

How do I get an IUD?
Your Ob/Gyn clinician can insert an IUD at an office visit. First, we’ll ask whether you might be pregnant and do a pregnancy test to confirm that you aren’t.

We’ll then use a small instrument (speculum) to gently open the vagina. Next, we use a thin tube to insert an IUD through your cervix and into your uterus.

Will I feel the IUD?
No. Both IUD types are soft and flexible. You can use pads or tampons during your period.

Contact your doctor to have your IUD checked if you feel pain during sex or the string is missing or feels longer. Be sure to check for the IUD string after your period each month.

Does the IUD cause infections like pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)?
No. PID is linked to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as chlamydia. The hormonal IUD may protect against PID, studies show. An IUD can be a good option even if you’ve had chlamydia, gonorrhea, an infection in your uterus, or PID (over 3 months ago).

Can I still get pregnant after my IUD is removed?
Yes. Once the IUD is removed, you’re able to get pregnant. Your chances are the same as other women your age.

Do I need to have children before I get an IUD?
No. IUDs are just as effective for women who haven’t had children or been pregnant.

Can I get an IUD after a pregnancy termination (abortion)?
Yes. Getting an IUD doesn’t increase the risk of infection after a pregnancy termination that’s done in the 1st or 2nd trimester.

Additional resources
For more information, tools, classes, and other resources:
• Search at kp.org/mydoctor
• Contact your local Health Education Department