**CONTRACEPTION**

Contraception (birth control) prevents pregnancy by interfering with the normal process of ovulation, fertilization, and implantation. There are different kinds of birth control that act at different points in the process.

**Purpose**

Every month, a woman's body begins the process that can potentially lead to pregnancy. An egg (ovum) matures, the mucus that is secreted by the cervix (a cylindrical-shaped organ at the lower end of the uterus) changes to be more inviting to sperm, and the lining of the uterus grows in preparation for receiving a fertilized egg. Any woman who wants to prevent pregnancy must use a reliable form of birth control.

Birth control (contraception) is designed to interfere with the normal process and prevent the pregnancy that could result. There are different kinds of birth control that act at different points in the process, from ovulation, through fertilization, to implantation. Each method has its own side effects and risks. Some methods are more reliable than others.

There are more different types of birth control available today than ever. They can be divided into a few groups based on how they work. These groups include:

**Hormonal methods**—These use medications (hormones) to prevent ovulation. Hormonal methods include birth control pills (oral contraceptives), Depo Provera injections, and Norplant.

**Barrier methods**—These methods work by preventing the sperm from getting to and fertilizing the egg. Barrier methods include the condom, diaphragm, and cervical cap. The condom is the only form of birth control that also protects against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

**Spermicides**—These medications kill sperm on contact. Most spermicides contain nonoxynyl-9. Spermicides come in many different forms such as jelly, foam, tablets, and even a transparent film. All are placed in the vagina. Spermicides work best when they are used at the same time as a barrier method.

**Intrauterine devices**—Intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs) are inserted into the uterus, where they stay from one to 10 years. An IUD prevents the fertilized egg from implanting in the lining of the uterus, and may have other effects as well.

**Tubal sterilization**—Tubal sterilization is a permanent form of contraception for women. Each fallopian tube is either tied or burned closed. The sperm cannot reach the egg, and the egg cannot travel to the uterus.

**Vasectomy**—is the male form of sterilization, and should also be considered permanent. In vasectomy, the vas defrens, the tiny tubes that carry the sperm into the semen, are cut and tied off. Thus, no sperm can get into the semen.

A newer and somewhat controversial form of birth control is emergency contraception. This type is used after unprotected intercourse and sometimes is referred to as the "morning-after pill".

Unfortunately, there is no perfect form of birth control. Only abstinence (not having sexual intercourse) can protect against unwanted pregnancy with 100% reliability. The failure rates, which means the rates of pregnancy, for most forms of birth control are quite low. However, some forms of birth control are more difficult or inconvenient to use than others. In actual practice, the birth control methods that are more difficult or inconvenient have much higher failure rates because they are not used regularly or as prescribed.

| **Types Of Contraceptives** | | |
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| **Effectiveness** | **Predicted (%)** | **Actual (%)** |
| **Birth control pills** | 99.9 | 97 |
| **Condoms** | 98 | 88 |
| **Depo Provera** | 99.7 | 99.7 |
| **Diaphragm** | 94 | 82 |
| **IUDs** | 99.2 | 97 |
| **Norplant** | 99.7 | 99.7 |
| **Tubal sterilization** | 99.8 | 99.6 |
| **Spermicides** | 97 | 79 |
| **Vasectomy** | 99.9 | 99.9 |