

Contraception

he pill and condoms are the most commonly used contraceptives, but

here are other methods that are also very reliable. The option that is

est for you depends on your current lifestyle and your personal needs

our doctor can help you choose the option that is right for you and

can advise you on any potential health risks. A family planning clinic

an also help you choose a suitable method of contraception.

at a glance

THE **PILL** usually contains a combination of the hormones oestrogen and progestogen and must be prescribed by a doctor. Some versions contain particularly low levels of hormones.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: The pill mainly works by stopping ovula tion, which prevents fertilisation. Depending on the version you use, it is taken every day for 21 or 24 days, at which time you will have your period. Used correctly, the pill provides virtually perfect protection from dav one.

- PROS: Very reliable and effective protection against pregnancy. Germany's statutory health insurance funds cover the cost of the pill for women under the age of 22. Women aged 18 and over must pay for part of the cost themselves.
- CONS: Many users may find it difficult to remember to take the pill every day. Side effects such as nausea, vertigo, headache and loss of libido may occur. Users – especially those who smoke – also have a slightly increased risk of blood clots (thrombosis).

E MINI PILL contains either levonorgestrel or desogestrel.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: The mini pill containing levonorgestre must always be taken on time to ensure that it works reliably. It works by thickening the mucus in the cervix to prevent sperm from entering the uterus. It also prevents the endometrium from thickening enough for a fertilised egg to attach. The hormone desogestrel prevents ovulation, making it a more reliably effective form of contraception.

- PROS: The mini pill generally has fewer side effects than the combination pill. It is particularly well suited for women who cannot tolerate oestrogen and is recommended for women who are breastfeeding but still want to use hormonal contraception.
- **CONS:** The mini pill containing levonorgestrel will not provide reliable protection if taken more than three hours late. The version containing desogestrel is no longer effective if taken more than twelve hours late. Side effects may include headache, acne, breast tender ness and mood swings.

CONDOMS are usually made of latex and are rolled onto the erect penis.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: A condom prevents sperm from entering the vagina. When put on correctly, it remains firmly in place. After ejaculation, it must be held in place at the base of the penis while pulling it out of the vagina. Condoms are a reliable method of contraception if used correctly and regularly. It is also essential to use the correct size (see **)** www.kondometer.de).

- : With the exception of latex allergies, which are rare, condoms do not have any side effects. They are also the only method of contraception that lowers the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection such as HIV during sexual intercourse.
- CONS: Some women may find it hard to ask their partner to wear a condom for protection – even though it is their right to do so!

A **COPPER IUD** consists of a plastic core wrapped in thin copper wire. Various shapes and sizes are available. It is inserted into the uterus by a doctor and provides protection for three to ten years.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: The copper released by the IUD changes the mucosal lining of the cervix and restricts the ability of sperm to move, preventing the implantation of fertilised eggs. Copper IUDs provide highly reliable contraceptive protection.

- PROS: No further contraception is necessary as long as the IUD remains in the uterus.
- CONS: IUDs increase menstrual flow in most women and may also increase menstrual cramps. Girls and young women in particular may have a higher risk of expulsion of the IUD from the uterus during the first few months of use.

A HORMONAL IUD is made of plastic and contains a small reserve of hormones. It is inserted into the uterus by a doctor and can be left in for up to five years.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: A hormonal IUD prevents the build-up of the endometrial lining and makes it difficult for sperm to reach the egg. It does not suppress ovulation.

PROS: Very reliable and effective protection against pregnancy. often reduces menstrual flow in women with heavy periods.

CONS: Some women may find it disturbing to have irregular or missed periods. Side effects are less common and less severe than with other hormonal contraceptives, but usually tend to occur in the first three months.

A **CONTRACEPTIVE IMPLANT** is a flexible rod containing progestogen that is inserted under the skin.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: Implants suppress ovulation, change the lining of the cervical canal and inhibit the build-up of the endometrial lining. Contraceptive implants provide excellent contraceptive protection.

- PROS: The implant is effective for up to three years. During that time, no further contraception is necessary.
- **CONS:** The side effects are similar to those of the mini pill. Changes in menstrual cycle with irregular intermenstrual bleeding are common.

OUARTERLY INJECTIONS contain the hormone progestogen and are injected into the buttocks. They should only be used by women who cannot use other methods.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: Progestogen suppresses ovulation and prevents sperm from entering the uterus. Quarterly injections provide good contraceptive protection.

- PROS: Women are protected from getting pregnant for three months after each iniection.
- **CONS:** Side effects such as intermenstrual bleeding, headache, anxiety and weight gain are more common than with other methods containing progestogen.

A **VAGINAL RING** is a flexible plastic ring containing hormones that is inserted into the vagina, where it remains for a period of three weeks. After four weeks, you will get your period.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: A combination of oestrogen and progestogen suppresses ovulation and prevents sperm from entering the uterus. When used correctly, a vaginal ring provides very reliable protection.

- PROS: A vaginal ring is easy to use. Once inserted, no further contraception is necessary for three weeks. Diarrhoea or vomiting will not stop it from working.
- CONS: As with any hormonal contraceptive, side effects are possible Women using a vaginal ring have a slightly higher risk of thrombosis, heart attack and stroke.

A **CONTRACEPTIVE PATCH** releases a combination of oestrogen and progestogen. It is placed on the stomach or on the buttocks and is changed weekly. After three weeks, the patch is removed so that you can have your period.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: The hormones suppress ovulation and prevent sperm from entering the uterus. The patch must be applied firm ly, ideally after showering. When used correctly, a contraceptive patch provides very reliable protection.

- PROS: No need to worry about contraception on a daily basis. Diarrhoea or vomiting will not stop it from working.
- **CONS:** The side effects are the same as for the pill. Women using a vaginal ring have a slightly higher risk of thrombosis, heart attack and stroke. Some women find the visible patch unsightly.

BARRIER METHODS all consist of a latex or silicone cap that seals off the cervix to prevent sperm from reaching the egg. Variations include the diaphragm and the FemCap[®].

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: A FemCap[®] has to be individually fitted by a doctor. Diaphragms are available in a single size, with an additional model available in a variety of sizes. Shortly before intercourse, a woman inserts the cap into her vagina and places it in front of the cervix to prevent sperm from entering. When used correctly with spermicidal gel, barrier methods provide reliable protection. Proper instruction is essential to correct use.

- PROS: Barrier methods are generally free of side effects. They only have to be used as needed and are cost-effective.
- CONS: A certain amount of practice and experience is necessary to ensure reliable contraception.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING METHODS (NFP) are based on identifying the days on which a woman is fertile or infertile. They include daily monitoring of basal body temperature (BBT) and cervical mucus.

HOW IT WORKS/RELIABILITY: Because a woman's basal body temperature increases following ovulation, monitoring BBT can help to determine the infertile days that follow. The same goes for daily monitoring of cervical mucus, which becomes more liquid shortly before ovulation. Both methods require women to be very familiar with their own bodies. Accompanied by additional contraception on fertile days, NFP provides relatively reliable contraception if used properly.

- PROS: No side effects. NFP promotes body awareness and consciousness of your own fertility.
- CONS: NFP methods require daily discipline and the use of additional contraception (such as condoms) or abstinence during fertile periods.

STERILISATION

Sterilisation is a very reliable method of contraception. In women, it involves surgery to remove, tie or cauterise the fallopian tubes. In men, it involves cutting or sealing the vas deferens. However, sterilisation requires careful thought and should not be considered until you are finished having children.

More information

For detailed information about preventing pregnancy, please see the leaflet "Safe and Sure - Contraception for Her and Him" (order no. 13060070).



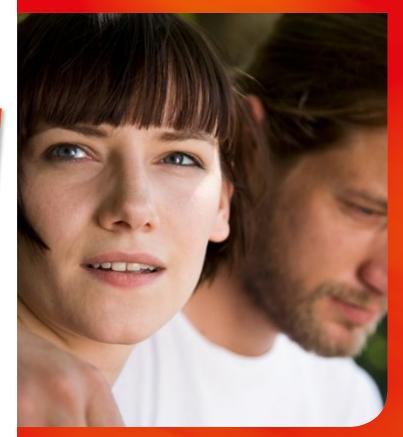
The poster "Verhütung im Überblick" provides an overview of contraception (order no. 13062000).

Further material from the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZqA) can be found in the media overview "Sexualaufklärung und Familienplanung – Medien und Materialien" (order no. 13010000) and online at >www.sexualaufklaerung.de

A wide range of information on contraception, pregnancy and childbirth is available at **) www.familienplanung.de**

The booklet, poster and leaflet are available free of charge from the Federal Centre for Health Education (Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung – BZgA), 50819 Cologne, Germany, or online at) order@bzga.de

Emergency contraception









Contraceptive failure can happen

It is easy to forget to take a pill in times of stress, and condoms can break or slip. Sometimes you might even forget all about contraception in the heat of the moment.

A mishap a few days before or during a woman's fertile period increases the likelihood of getting pregnant. A man's sperm cells can survive up to five days in the uterus and the fallopian tubes. Conception may occur up to five days after having unprotected sex if a woman starts to ovulate during that time. In rare cases, conception may even be possible up to seven days after having unprotected sex.

If your contraception keeps failing you, you may want to think about switching to a different method. (\rightarrow See the back of this leaflet for an overview.)

Emergency contraception

The morning-after pill is one option that can be used after unprotected sex. Various formulations with different active ingredients – either levonorgestrel or ulipristal acetate – are available. Versions containing levonorgestrel may be taken up to 72 hours (three days) after unprotected sex. Morning-after pills containing ulipristal acetate may be taken up to 120 hours (five days) after intercourse. After more than 120 hours, it is too late for the morning-after pill. However, the morning-after pill can only provide reliable protection from an unwanted pregnancy if you take it before ovulation starts.

That is why it is so important to take the morning-after pill as soon as possible after having unprotected sex.

The morning-after pill provides emergency contraception. It is not meant for regular or long-term use.

How does the morning-after pill work?

Both active ingredients suppress or delay ovulation to prevent conception. Formulations with levonorgestrel are effective if taken roughly two days or more before ovulation. Versions containing ulipristal acetate can even be taken the day before ovulation. Neither formulation will work if ovulation is about to happen or has already occurred. To prevent ovulation, the morning-after pill should be taken as soon as possible, ideally within 12 hours of unprotected sex. After that, it will gradually become less effective.

The morning-after pill will **no longer** work if ovulation has already taken place and/or if the fertilised egg has already implanted itself in the uterus. The morning-after pill is therefore not an abortion pill, although it is often confused with one.

When should I **not take** the morning-after pill?

Women who are sensitive to levonorgestrel, ulipristal acetate or any of the other ingredients found in the morning-after pill should not take it.

Women who have already had an infection of the fallopian tubes or have had an ectopic pregnancy should ask their doctor whether the morning-after pill is right for them.

The morning-after pill is also not recommended for women with hepatic impairment. The version of the morning-after pill containing levonorgestrel is not recommended for women with an increased risk of thrombosis or with a family history of thrombosis. The active ingredient ulipristal acetate should not be taken by women with severe asthma who are on glucocorticoids.

How do I take the morning-after pill?

The morning-after pill is available in pharmacies without a prescription. Pharmacists can also advise you by discussing whether you may already be pregnant, how likely conception is and whether there are any contraindications or potential interactions with other medications.

All versions involve taking a single tablet, ideally within 12 hours of unprotected sex.

It is advisable to have a light meal or snack, such as a piece of toast, before taking the morning-after pill. You risk vomiting the pill back up if you take it on an empty stomach. If you regurgitate the pill within three hours of taking it, you will need to obtain and take another tablet as soon as possible to make sure it works.

What should I look out for after taking the pill?

Taking the morning-after pill may cause you to get your period earlier or later than usual. Please take a pregnancy test and see a doctor if you do not have your period within one week of your expected date.

If you are on birth control pills and take the morning-after pill with levonorgestrel, you should continue to take your regular birth control pill until the end of your cycle and use a non-hormonal contraceptive such as condoms for a period of seven days. If you take a combination containing the active ingredient ulipristal acetate, you should stop taking your regular birth control pill for five days and use an additional method of contraception such as condoms. **!** You will need to use non-hormonal contraception such as condoms until you get your next period.

Does the morning-after pill have any **side effects?**

Side effects are possible with the morning-after pill but are usually not serious. They mainly include headache, nausea and abdominal pain. Breakthrough bleeding and spotting, breast tenderness, vertigo and vomiting may also occur.

Please do not hesitate to seek medical advice if you are in pain or have other concerns.

What else do I need to know?

The morning-after pill may be less effective if you are also taking other medication such as certain antibiotics, medication for seizures (antiepileptic drugs) or HIV infection, antiviral drugs or products containing St. John's wort. Women who regularly take medication or have taken medication until recently should talk to a pharmacist or a doctor before taking the morning-after pill.

Obesity may also potentially reduce the effectiveness of the morningafter pill, especially versions with levonorgestrel.



Frequently asked questions

Some questions about the morning-after pill get asked time and again. The answers given here are not a substitute for a personal consultation with a pharmacist or doctor. Please seek medical advice if you have any problems or further questions.

? How and where can I get the morning-after pill? The morning-after pill is available in pharmacies without a prescription. Pharmacists can also advise you.

Some pharmacies may refuse to dispense the morning-after pill. If that happens, please visit another pharmacy. Certain local pharmacies are open at night and at the weekend for emergencies. Information is available online or by phone, or see the schedule of opening hours at any pharmacy.

? How much does the morning-after pill cost? Right now, versions with levonorgestrel cost around 18 euros, while formulations with ulipristal acetate cost around 35 euros. The price of the morning-after pill may vary, as there is no fixed retail price.

Even though the morning-after pill is now available without a prescription, Germany's statutory health insurance funds will pay the cost of treatment for women under the age of 22, provided they are covered by a statutory health insurance fund and have a doctor's prescription for the morning-after pill. However, women aged 18 and over must pay for part of the cost themselves. Women under the age of 22 can also buy the morning-after at a pharmacy without a prescription but cannot claim the cost back from their insurer. **?** Do minors need their parents' permission? Girls under the age of 14 need their parents' permission to buy or get a prescription for the morning-after pill.

For young women between the ages of 14 and 18, the decision to sell or prescribe the pill is at the discretion of the pharmacist or doctor. During consultation, they will try to find out whether a minor is capable of making the decisions and handling the consequences involved with self-medication.

? Is there a risk of unwanted pregnancy at any point in a woman's monthly cycle? Yes, in theory. Although the likelihood of getting pregnant is highest if you have unprotected sex during ovulation or a few days before, ovulation can be delayed without you noticing. It is therefore possible to get pregnant by having sexual intercourse during your usual monthly period. You should therefore seek the advice of a pharmacist or doctor and consider taking the morning-after pill if you want to be on the safe side after a contraceptive emergency.

? How can I tell if the morning-after pill is working? It is not always possible to feel the effects of the morning-after pill. Often there are no side effects such as nausea and vomiting, headache or abdominal cramps. But that does not mean that the morning-after pill is not working.

What is a morning-after IUD? A copper IUD can be used to prevent a fertilised egg from attaching to the uterus up to five days after unprotected sexual intercourse. The IUD must be inserted by a doctor. Apart from acting as emergency contraception, it may make sense for women who would like to continue using it as birth control.

Depending on the model, an IUD coil costs between 120 and 300 euros, while a frameless IUD costs between 200 and 350 euros. The price includes consultation, examination and insertion.

If I get my period after taking the morning-after pill, does that mean I am definitely not pregnant? Generally speaking, getting your period around your expected date (or a little later) and no lighter or heavier than normal is a sign that you are not pregnant. However, having your period is not a guarantee, as it could be breakthrough or intermenstrual bleeding.

Please take a pregnancy test and see a doctor if your period is more than a week late or if there are other signs that you may be pregnant, such as unusually light or heavy bleeding, abdominal pain, breast tenderness or nausea. **?** Does the morning-after pill provide enough contraceptive protection to last until the end of my cycle? No. You must use non-hormonal contraception such as condoms for the rest of your cycle until you get your next period.

Can I use the morning-after pill as a normal contraceptive? No. The morning-after pill is a drug that is only used in an emergency.

When is the morning-after pill an option for mistakes involving hormonal contraceptives? The package leaflet of any hormonal contraceptive provides information on the circumstances in which contraceptive protection is no longer reliable. This may depend on the time in your cycle when the contraceptive emergency occurs, such as the week in which you forgot to take your birth control pill or when your vaginal ring slipped out.

It is advisable to talk to a pharmacist or doctor as soon as possible after having unprotected sex to discuss whether taking the morning-after pill is right for you.

> www.familienplanung.de/pille-vergessen

? Can I take the morning-after pill if I am still breastfeeding? Yes, with restrictions. The hormone levonorgestrel passes into your breast milk. If you use a version of the morning-after pill containing this active ingredient, you should take it immediately after breastfeeding your baby and then wait at least eight hours before breastfeeding again.

If you have taken a version of the morning-after pill containing the active ingredient ulipristal acetate, you should wait at least a week before breastfeeding again. During this time, it may make sense to pump your breast milk to maintain lactation. You will need to throw the milk away.

? What should I do next if I am using the birth control pill for contracep-

tion? Women who use the birth control pill as a method of contraception and who have taken the morning-after pill containing levonorgestrel because they forgot to take their regular contraceptive or made a mistake in how they take it should continue to take their birth control pill and use a non-hormonal contraceptive for a period of seven days. If you have taken a version of the morning-after pill containing ulipristal acetate, you should stop taking your regular birth control pill for five days and use a different method of contraception such as condoms.

Advice

Advice on sexuality, contraception, family planning and pregnancy is available to everyone free of charge at a pregnancy counselling centre. If you are pregnant and are unsure whether you want to have the baby or are afraid of potential conflicts, such advisory services can help you weigh up the pros and cons of your pregnancy. Family planning clinics can also provide information about financial support options and other programmes to help families and children. In addition, they provide assistance with relationship conflicts related to family planning.

The counselling centres are required to maintain your confidentiality and can advise you anonymously. Pregnancy counselling centres are operated by religious organisations, other charitable associations, independent providers and local health authorities.

i To find a counselling centre near you, please check a telephone directory, ask your local social services or health authorities, or visit *) www.familienplanung.de/beratungsstellensuche*

If you need to terminate your pregnancy, you must visit a licensed pregnancy counselling centre first. Terminating your pregnancy within the first twelve weeks of conception is only legal if you can provide a certificate stating that you have visited a pregnancy counselling centre. Caritas and Sozialdienst Katholischer Frauen do not issue counselling certificates but can provide pregnancy counselling.

For more information on contraception, pregnancy and advice, visit **)** www.familienplanung.de

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