C Dr Fox Guide to Contraception





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Which Contraception Is Suitable for Me?

There are at least 15 methods of contraception available and, within those categories usually even more options to consider. Naturally, you want to find a method that suits you, but as you probably already know, this can be pretty confusing.

Everyone has different needs and wants from their contraception and these will determine what works best for you. It's important to realise that contraception can affect your body and mind, not just your sex life. Therefore it's essential that you research the area before rushing into any decisions.

Like anything, each option has its pros and cons and some may even be deal breakers. Thankfully, there are numerous avenues to try and it doesn't matter if the one you pick isn't quite right for you – there is always another way.

So, what options are there?

Combined pill

More commonly known as the pill this contraception is taken orally like a normal tablet. The combined pill contains synthetic (artificial) versions of the female hormones oestrogen and progesterone, which women produce naturally in their ovaries. The pill works by preventing your ovaries from releasing, decreases the chance of sperm reaching, an egg.

Key things you need to know

- When used correctly it is 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.
- You take it every day for 21 days, and then stop for seven days where you have a period-type bleed. You then repeat this cycle every month.
- You need to take the pill at the same time every day.
- The pill can help heavy or painful periods.
- Side effects include mood swings, breast tenderness and headaches.
- Low risk of serious side effects.
- The pill is not suitable for women over 35 who smoke or women with certain medical conditions. (Contact your GP for more information)

Is it right for me?

The pill is a popular form of contraception as it is easily administered and does not interrupt sexual activity.

Some people find the pill helps to reduce symptoms of premenstrual syndrome and makes bleeding lighter and less painful. There are also pills which can sometimes reduce acne. If you have any of these symptoms, considering the pill as a solution for both contraception and another problem may benefit you.

However, some women don't react as well to the pill as others and symptoms of headaches, nausea and mood swings can occur. There are lots of varieties of pill and it may take a few attempts before you find one that works for you. Therefore some level of patience is needed for this method.

An alternative to the combined oral contraceptive pill is the **mini-pill** or **progestogen only pill**, which is a daily low dose pill containing no oestrogen. It may be preferred in some women. The mini-pill needs to be taken very regularly if it is to be an effective contraceptive.

Contraceptive implant

Another option to consider is the implant. The implant is a small flexible tube that's inserted under your skin in the upper part of your arm. It releases progestogen hormones into your body which thickens the cervical mucus and thins the womb lining. This makes it less likely that your womb will accept a fertilised egg. The implant is embedded by a trained professional and lasts for three years.

Key things you need to know

- If inserted correctly, it is more than 99% effective.
- Useful for women who can't use contraception that contains oestrogen.
- The implant can be removed at any time (for example, if you have side effects) and your fertility will return quickly.
- Some bruising, tenderness or swelling can occur.
- When you first have the implant your periods may become irregular, lighter, heavier or longer. This will settle eventually.
- A common side effect is that your periods may stop but this is not harmful.
- Some medications can make the implant less effective.

Is it right for me?

The implant is a favourable option for women who know they don't want to get pregnant for a while. Once the implant is in place, you don't have to worry about contraception for three years.

The implant is easier for women who struggle to remember taking a pill at the same time every day, the day to day worry about contraception being removed. However some women note that they get acne or their acne worsens with the implant, so this is something to consider. Additionally, the small procedure to fit and remove the implant may be unpleasant for certain people.

Male condoms

Condoms are the only contraception that is worn by men. They are made from very thin latex and designed to be inserted on the penis to prevent the male's sperm entering his sexual partner. When condoms are used correctly, they are the only contraception that also protects against sexually transmitted infections (STI's).

Key things you need to know

- If used correctly they are 98% effective.
- Condoms are free at various contraception and sexual health clinics.
- It is possible for a condom to slip off during sex.
- They need to be stored correctly.
- Condoms all have a use by date that needs to be followed.

Is it right for me?

If you do not respond well to contraception that uses hormones, condoms may be a viable option for you.

Whilst condoms have a high rate of preventing pregnancy if used correctly, this contraception is not a method the woman has complete control of. This means a level of trust must be taken to ensure your sexual partner is using the condom appropriately. Accidents (e.g. condom slipping off), although not common, don't guarantee you peace of mind about the possibility of pregnancy. Remembering to have/use them every time you have sex has its advantages and disadvantages. For one, you only need to ensure you use them during intercourse which means you can be spontaneous. Although, remembering to use one every single time may be difficult for some people and many find they have sex anyway even if neither person has a condom – a situation that carries risk of STIs, or possibly pregnancy.

Remember that other forms of contraception may prevent pregnancy but they do not protect you from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's). Condoms are the only contraception that prevents infections, therefore it's best to use one every time you have intercourse with a new partner.

What else is there?

A few more hormonal options...

Contraceptive patch

This involves the same hormones as the combined pill except the patch is placed on your skin and transfers the hormones to your body this way. The patch is replaced on a weekly basis and is more than 99% effective. The benefits are that you don't have to remember to take a pill every day for those who are squeamish or don't want to commit to 3 months of contraception.

Contraceptive injection

The injection uses hormones that are similar to the implant. It lasts up to eight to twelve weeks depending on the injection and is more than 99% effective.

There are also physical insertion methods...

Diaphragm and contraceptive cap

Caps/Diaphragms are inserted into your vagina before sex to cover your cervix and prevent sperm from reaching your womb. When used correctly, these methods are 92-96% effective at preventing pregnancy.

This option is convenient for some people as it's only necessary during sex and does not have side effects. This is often more popular with women than condoms as they give a feeling of control over contraception.



An Introduction to the Contraceptive Pill

The first contraceptive pill became available in 1961 in the UK and revolutionised many women's lives. Even though it is now one of the most popular and widely used forms of contraception, young women interested in using the pill are often confused and have many questions. Here we hope to answer them all.

What is it?

The contraceptive pill is usually just called the pill, or COC pill. It contains synthetic (artificial) versions of the female hormones oestrogen and progesterone, which are produced naturally in ovaries. It's these hormones that prevent you from getting pregnant.

When taken correctly, the pill has a high success rate of over 99%.

Although the pill isn't just used for contraception; it can help with heavy/painful periods – making your bleeds regular and lighter. Additionally it can reduce symptoms of premenstrual syndrome and even lessen the appearance of acne.

How does it work?

Primarily, the hormones in the pill prevent pregnancy by stopping your body from ovulating (releasing an egg), but it has additional functions:

- Thickens mucus in the neck of the womb which makes it difficult for sperm to permeate and fertilise an egg.
- Thins the lining of the womb so there is less chance of a fertilised egg implanting and being able to grow.

Two main types of pill

There are **combined oral contraceptive** pills (COCs) which contain two hormones, an oestrogen and a progestogen and **progestogen only** pills (POPs Or mini-pills) which contain only a progestogen.

Combined pills are usually slightly more reliable in preventing pregnancy and in regulating periods. Progestogen only pills (POPs), contain lower doses of hormone and tend to have fewer side effects.

Types of Combined Pills

Monophasic 21-day pills

This type of pill is generally the most common and there are many different brands, such as Microgynon, Brevinor and Cilest, to name just a few. Each type has a different level of active ingredients and your GP will help you decide which is best for you.

Each pill in the pack contains the same amount and type of hormone. These are taken every day for 21 days and then no pills for the next 7 days. Sometimes, instead of having a break of 7 days taking no pill, calendar pack will contain 7 'dummy tablets' which have no active ingredients.

Phasic 21-day pills

Phasic pills, such as Binovum and Logynon, need to be taken in the right order as they contain two or three sections of different coloured pills in a pack. Each section contains a different amount of hormones. One pill is taken each day for 21 days and then no pills are taken for the next 7 days.

Every day (ED) pills

As is expected, every day pills are to be taken every day and in the right order. As with other types of combined pill there are a number of different brands to choose from, all

including ED in the name, such as Microgynon ED and Logynon ED.

There are 21 active pills and 7 inactive (dummy) pills in a pack. The two types of pill look different. One pill is taken each day for 28 days with no break between packets of pills.

Whichever pill you take, there will be instructions in the packet. Read these carefully before taking them as failing to comply could result in them not being effective.

How to start the combined pill

Most women can start the pill at any time in their menstrual cycle.

If you start the pill on the first day of your period, you will be protected from pregnancy straight away. If you start the pill on the fifth day of your period or before you will still be protected from pregnancy straight away, unless you have a short menstrual cycle. In this case condoms should be used for up to 7 days.

If you start the pill on any other day of your cycle you will not be protected from pregnancy straight away and will need additional contraception until you have taken the pill for 7 days.

Side effects

Minor side effects can include mood swings, breast tenderness and headaches.

The risks

As with anything, there are a few risks to be aware of before taking the pill. Reassuringly, these risks are small, but it's important to weigh up any benefits and risks when making decisions about contraception.

Blood clots can be caused from the pill as oestrogen causing the blood to clot more easily. This can lead to thrombosis and strokes/heart attacks. However, this risk is minimal and certain factors make people more vulnerable.

There are a number of reasons that people are advised not to take the pill. They include:

- Being 35 years old or over
- Being a smoker or recent smoker (past year)
- Being overweight
- Suffering from migraines
- Having high blood pressure
- Having clots run in the family
- Being immobile (e.g. a wheelchair)

Cancer research is still being conducted but there may be a link between certain cancers and the pill. These include breast cancer, cervical cancer and a rare form of liver cancer. However, research has also suggested that the pill offers protection against some cancers, including endometrium (lining of womb), ovarian and colon cancer.

Where you can get the combined pill?

There are various ways you can get the pill. The services are confidential, including for people under the age of 16. Here's where you can find them:

- Local GP
- Contraception/GUM (genitourinary medicine) clinics.
- You can also get it online from our NHS-registered pharmacy.



Everything You Need to Know About Emergency Contraception

The panic that a mistake with contraception can make isn't any fun. But if it does happen, emergency contraception (aka the morning after pill) can put your mind at ease, just as long as you follow these simple guidelines ... and relax.

When Should I Take It?

Emergency Contraception must only be used in an emergency, hence the name. It is not a general form of contraception and should never be used instead of your regular contraceptive method.

The **morning after pill** is designed to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or if a method of contraception has failed and must be taken within 72 hours of intercourse, as a matter of urgency. There are two types. Levonelle can be taken up to 72 hours after sex, but EllaOne can still be taken up to 120 hours (5 days) after intercourse and is generally considered more effective.

How Does It Work?

The hormone contained in the pill can do a number of things to prevent the pregnancy. These include delaying ovulation, affecting the development of the uterine lining, and disrupting the actual fertilisation process. This is why it is important that emergency contraception is taken as soon as possible in order to maximise effectiveness. Although, it is important to remember that it does not 100% ensure you will not fall pregnant.

Where Can I Get It?

Levonelle is stocked in most pharmacies at around £25, but EllaOne is a prescription only pill, so you will need to contact your nearest GP or Health Centre or low cost tablets can be purchased from our online NHS pharmacy.

Side Effects

Often the morning after pill will have some side effects such as stomach pains, headaches, irregular menstrual bleeding, nausea, or tiredness. There are some less common side effects too, which include vomiting, dizziness, and breast tenderness, but consult your GP or family planning clinic if you are worried about any of these.

Always remember to read the information leaflet carefully before taking any medication.



Norethisterone: How to Delay Your Period Safely

Periods can be pretty annoying at the best of times, but for some occasions, such as backpacking or going to a festival, they really can get in the way. Wouldn't it be great if you could pick and choose when your period comes? Well the good news is, you can. Here's how to do it the safe and sensible way.

What Is It?

Norethisterone is hard to spell, but it is pretty useful. It is used mainly to treat a number of menstrual cycle disorders, but it can also be used to control periods. It is a prescription only tablet, so you will have to get an prescription either online or head to your local health centre to get it. You can find your university's local health centre here.

When Should I Take It?

You need to take the 5mg tablets 3 times a day, beginning 4-5 days before your period is normally due (or an estimated day if yours is quite irregular), and continue to take it for as long as you want to postpone the period. Your period will then return a minimum of 2-3 days after you stopping Norethisterone.

How Much Does It Cost?

30 tablets cost £14.50 from our NHS-register pharmacy, This amount will last 10 days. If you need norethisterone for longer, prices will vary. If you already have a private prescription, the the cost will be different.

Side Effects

The side effects of Norethisterone are not generally a problem, although as with many tablets, there are risks of side effects. The most common include bloating, breast tenderness, loss of libido, and stomach pains. Tese are more likely to occur if the tablet is taken on a long term basis (which is normally only the case if you are using it for a menstrual cycle disorder).

Things to Remember

- Norethisterone is **NOT a contraceptive pill**, and will **NOT prevent pregnancy**.
- If you are **currently taking a contraceptive pill**, you should **NOT use Nore-thisterone** to delay your periods.
- Norethisterone should NOT be requested more than once every 4 months.

Don't forget to read the manufacturer's information leaflet which come with the tables fully. Yes it's long and boring, but it is important and only there to make sure you treat your body right.



Not Just Contraception: Other Uses of the Pill

The combined pill contains progestogen hormone, and synthetic estrogen. Most commonly the combined pill is an effective means of contraception.

However, did you know these hormones can offer several other health benefits? In fact, some benefits of the pill are so important that patients may take them exclusively for those reasons.

Periods are different for every woman, and if you're unlucky, they bring a lot of pain and complications.

Fortunately, the pill can have positive effects on problems such as period pain and premenstrual syndrome, but that's not all they can be good for...

Here are some other popular uses for the pill.

Clearer Skin

Skin conditions like acne can be a real problem when it comes to finding a solution. Acne is sometimes associated with excessive androgen (male hormone) levels in your body and some pills reduce the levels. How this works depends on which pill you take and the combination of hormones contained in them.

Taking the combination of norgestimate and ethinyl estradiol could reduce the appearance of acne. There are other options too, such as Yasmin, which can be found in our online pharmacy. Always consult a GP first before obtaining contraceptive pills online.

With any of these options, you are likely to see improvements in your skin in a couple of months.

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) Relief

Different symptoms of PMS require different pills but relief is available for most issues. A common problem is breast tenderness; the solution for this is a pill lower in oestrogen, such as Micronor. If bloating is bothersome, trying a pill containing drospirenone has been found to help prevent fluid retention, e.g. Yasmin or Yaz.

Take the pill for three to four months to see whether this provides any success.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) Relief

PCOS is a hormonal disorder that triggers irregular cycles, excessive hair growth, and acne. Although the pill cannot cure it, research has shown that it can offer symptom relief. Experts recommend women who have it to take a pill with 30 to 35 mcg of oestrogen. Oestrogen can combat all problems related to PCOS.

Reduces Period Pain

Most pills ensure the taker bleeds less for a shorter time which results in little or no cramping.

This is because you don't ovulate when using the pill, so your uterine lining doesn't build up as much. Women who suffer from anaemia (iron deficiency) due to heavy periods could consider the pill for health reasons.

Controls Periods

Women on the pill can reschedule their period so it doesn't come at inconvenient times. This can be done on a monophasic formula, which contains pills in only two different colours: one for the active pills and one for the placebos. You simply keep taking active pills (typically up to three months) and switch to placebos when you're ready to menstruate.

There is some debate among healthcare professionals about using synthetic hormones for these purposes. It's important to realise that oral contraceptives are not the answer to every problem and there could be more natural options for some of the conditions.



Your Worries About the Morning After Pill Answered

As with every type of medicine, there are natural worries that come with taking the morning after pill. If you're worried about it then you can bet that someone else will be too. You're not alone. So we've put together the answers to the most common questions to put your mind at ease.

Can I Still Become Pregnant if I Have Taken It?

As much as we'd love every form of contraception to be 100% effective, unfortunately this just isn't the case. Two types of morning after pill are commonly used in the UK – Levonelle and EllaOne with EllaOne being slightly more effective.

If taken within the first 72 hours after intercourse, pregnancy rates are close to 2 in 100 with Levonelle and 1.5 in 100 with EllaOne. The sooner you take either, the more effective it will be preventing pregnancy.

Will It Work if I Take It Before Sex?

There are other forms of contraception designed to be taken before sex to prevent pregnancy. The morning after pill isn't one of them and should not be used in this way. The morning after pill is designed to be taken ONLY in an emergency – when another form of contraception has failed or been forgotten.

How Do I know It Worked?

The morning after pill may delay your period or make it arrive early. You only need to be concerned if your period is more than 5 days later than expected. A simple urine pregnancy test will be needed, if your period is delayed by 5 or more days.

Can You Take the Morning After Pill More Than Once?

Knowing that the morning after pill is an option after unprotected sex makes it tempting to get lazy with regular contraception. Not only is this not recommended, would less effective and could be expensive.

A morning after pill should not be used more than once in the same menstrual cycle, but if you find you absolutely need to – always talk to your GP about it first.

What About if You Are Already Pregnant When You Take It?

Don't panic, the morning after pill will not cause harm to the baby, nor will it terminate the pregnancy. In fact, there is no known evidence of negative effects.

Does the Morning After Pill Change Your Period?

Most contraceptive pills, implants or coils will have some sort of effect on your periods, but this is normal and is very unlikely to affect fertility now or later in life. You may experience menstrual bleeding before your next period is due. Early bleeding is usually a sign the pill has worked; it is as well to be prepared.

What About Other Side Effects?

Serious side effects with morning after pills are infrequent. The more common side effects are headache, nausea, weariness, dizziness and more painful periods. You can find more information about side effects here.

Can It Affect Future Fertility?

The chances of you getting pregnant in the future are not affected by the morning after pill. It is there to prevent the pregnancy on the occasion you take it, and will have no affect later in life.

Can the Morning After Pill Be Taken During Your Period?

Don't worry about the timing of your menstrual cycle when you take it, the key thing to remember is just to take it as soon as possible. Is more effective taken early after intercourse.

Should I Stop my Regular Form of Contraception?

The great thing about the morning after pill is that nothing else needs to be put on hold. Keep taking your other form of contraception just as normal to keep you safe, but if you are taking this properly you shouldn't need to get the morning after pill anyway.

If you've had unprotected sex and are worried about pregnancy you can get the morning after pill from your GP, family planning clinic, over the counter. Standby supplies for just-in-case needs can be obtained from Dr Fox online clinic.



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