

Contraceptive implant

The contraceptive implant is a thin, flexible, plastic rod (4cm x 2mm) containing a progestogen hormone. It is placed under the skin on the inside of your upper arm and can stay there for up to three years to prevent pregnancy. The procedure only takes a few minutes.

How does it work?

The contraceptive implant stops pregnancy by releasing a small but constant amount of a progestogen hormone (like one of the hormones made in the ovaries). This stops the ovaries from releasing an egg each month. It also thickens the mucus/fluid at the cervix (opening to the uterus/womb) so that sperm cannot get through to meet an egg.

How effective is it?

The contraceptive implant is 99.95% effective – that is, if 1,000 people used it for a year, it is unlikely one of them might become pregnant. It is the most reliable contraception available and is much more reliable than the contraceptive pill as there is no need for you to remember to take a pill every day. No contraceptive is 100% effective.

Will it work immediately?

If the implant is inserted within the first 5 days of the menstrual cycle (where day 1 is the first day of your period), or within the first 5 days after an abortion or miscarriage, then it is effective immediately. If it is inserted at another time during your menstrual cycle, another form of contraception (such as condoms) should be used for the next 7 days to avoid unplanned pregnancy. Your doctor will discuss with you the best time to have the contraceptive implant inserted, as they need to check you are not already pregnant. It can also be inserted at the time of an abortion.

How long will it last?

The implant is a good method for those who want a long term, reversible, convenient contraceptive, as each implant lasts up to three years (although it can be removed at any time). The implant must be removed and/or replaced after three years. Not only will it not protect against pregnancy, leaving it in place after this time may increase the risk of ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus).

What are the side effects?

Most people will notice a change in their periods. These changes can include:

- no bleeding (around 1 in 5 people)
- occasional light bleeding (around 3 in 5 people)
- frequent or prolonged bleeding (around 1 in 5 people)

Bleeding changes often settle in the first 3 months of use. If you are still worried about bleeding changes after this time, call us or speak with your doctor.

Other side effects are uncommon, but some people sensitive to the hormone in the implant may experience acne, headaches, moodiness, weight gain and breast tenderness. These symptoms usually improve over time. If you are at all concerned about any symptoms you think may be caused by this contraceptive, call us or speak with your doctor.

What if I want to stop using the contraceptive implant? Is it reversible?

A contraceptive implant is easily removed and quickly reversible. Your normal period pattern and previous fertility usually return within a month of the device being removed. If you do not want to get pregnant, you need to use another form of contraception as soon as the device is removed.

Who should not use a contraceptive implant?

There are a few circumstances and medical conditions where you should not use a contraceptive implant. Before using the contraceptive, you should let your doctor know if you:

- May be pregnant
- Have or have had breast cancer
- Are taking any medications, especially for epilepsy
- Have had previous reactions to local anaesthetic, or plastics or an implant in the past.

Your doctor will talk with you about the contraceptive implant and help you decide whether it is the best contraceptive method for you.

What if I am breastfeeding?

A contraceptive implant is safe in breastfeeding from birth.

What else should I consider?

There may be some bruising after the implant is put in, and a small scar after the implant is taken out. Some people are predisposed to develop a thicker scar.

Implants offer no protection against STIs.

How is a contraceptive implant inserted?

A small amount of local anaesthetic is injected under the skin on the inside of your upper arm. This will numb the area so you won't feel the implant going into your arm.

The contraceptive implant is placed just under the skin of your arm using a sterile disposable applicator. A dressing will then be put on which should be left in place for 24 hours. This process should only take a few minutes. There may be some bruising, soreness or discomfort around the implant following the insertion, which should last no longer than one week.

How is the device removed?

The contraceptive implant is removed in a simple procedure which only takes a few minutes. Local anaesthetic is injected into the area and a tiny cut is then made in the skin, through which the implant is taken out. Stitches are rarely required. Although the implant rarely moves, if it has moved from its original position, it could make removal more difficult. A dressing is then put on and should be left in place for 24 hours.

Can I get a new one inserted when I remove the old one?

Yes, if you want ongoing, reliable contraception a new implant can be put in at the same time the other one is removed.

Where can I get it?

A doctor's prescription is required to get a contraceptive implant device or you can purchase the device from us at the time of insertion. The contraceptive implant must be inserted by a specially trained healthcare professional, such as one of ours, some GPs or a family planning centre.



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