

Talking to Your Doctor About Contraception

There are many different types of contraception available. The one you choose will depend on a range of considerations, such as your health, medical history, lifestyle, and personal preference. A doctor, gynaecologist, or family planning healthcare professional can help you understand which options are suitable for you and why.

This guide is designed to help you prepare for your conversation with a healthcare professional.

Before you go

You can find information about the many different types of contraception available by researching online and talking to other women.

Some common methods of birth control include:

- Oral contraceptive pill
- Birth control patches
- Contraceptive injection
- Intrauterine device (IUD)
- Intrauterine System (IUS)
- Condoms
- Diaphragm or cap, and spermicide
- Implants

Things to consider

- Can you commit to taking a pill at the same time every day?
- How do you feel about your periods changing? Hormonal contraception causes a withdrawal bleed which is different to your period that you have when you are not on hormonal contraception. Withdrawal bleeds can cause lighter, heavier or irregular bleeds compared to your period.
- Did you know certain contraceptives contain hormones? These hormones work to suppress the ovulation cycle and provide effective contraception. There are both natural and synthetic hormones available.
- Are you comfortable with the idea of inserting a diaphragm into your vagina?
- Would you prefer contraception that you don't have to think about once it's been fitted, like an IUD or implant?
- Do you think you are experiencing an irregular period? Symptoms of which can include heavy bleeding, absence of bleeding and spotting to name a few. Ask your doctor about a contraceptive option with a good cycle control profile.

You must also think about your sexual health. Condoms are the only type of contraception that protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and they can be used in addition to other methods.

During your appointment

- **Your doctor may ask about your medical history and any health conditions.** There are many types of birth control. Some are barrier methods, others contain either single or multiple hormones. Some types of birth control will be better suited to your needs than others. Your age and history of smoking, blood clots, blood pressure and diabetes are all common considerations that will ensure the right choice for you.
- **You and your doctor will make a joint decision about which contraception is right for you.** You need to be comfortable and happy with the method you choose to ensure you receive the contraception that suits you and your body and gives you the level of birth control you require. No contraception delivers 100% pregnancy prevention.
- **Ask questions.** If you have any concerns or worries about any of the types of contraception available, share them with your doctor.
- **Your doctor will ask about your birth control needs.** It is common for a prescribing doctor to ask you about your sexual partner/s as this informs the recommended choice of contraception. The doctor is used to asking these types of questions and will use your answers to ensure you have the correct type of contraception for your needs.
- **Be clear on how your chosen contraception method works.** Your contraception will include a patient information leaflet for you to read. You can also receive education and information from your prescribing doctor, gynaecologist, family planning doctor or nurse. You may want to ask how you will know your birth control is working and what to do if you experience side effects or are concerned that it may have stopped being effective.

What happens next?

- Follow your doctor's instructions on how to use your contraception to make sure it is effective.
- Your doctor will warn you of any likely side effects and what to do if they should occur. You may need to go back to your doctor if you feel your chosen contraception doesn't suit you.
- Protect your sexual health by using condoms and getting regular STI checks.

Conversation starters

“How long can I / should I stay on contraception?”

“I’ve just had a baby, and I’m breastfeeding. Which contraception is safe for me to use?”

“Based on our consultation, what contraception do you think is best suited to my lifestyle and why?”

“Can I expect any potential benefits or side effects from my chosen form of contraception?”

“I’ve been thinking about having a contraceptive implant, but I’m worried about it being uncomfortable. Please can you explain how it is inserted and removed?”

“What hormones are best suited to my body?”

“What is the difference between an IUD and an IUS? Which would be better for me?”