

Birth Control Injection

What is the birth control injection?

The birth control injection is given to help prevent pregnancy. It contains a hormone (progestin) that is like a woman's natural hormone. It doesn't contain estrogen. The hormone stops your body from releasing an egg. If you don't release an egg, you can't get pregnant.

How well does the injection work?

- 8 to 9 out of 10 women will get pregnant in one year if having intercourse without birth control.
- With typical use (this means not following the exact directions, for example, you might get your injection late) the injection is **97 percent** effective.
- With perfect use (this means you follow the exact directions all the time) the injection is **99.9 percent** effective.
- The injection doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (vaginal, oral, anal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.

How do I use the injection?

The birth control injection is given by a healthcare provider. You need a prescription for the injection. It needs to be given every 10 to 12 weeks in the arm or buttocks.

There are different ways to start the injection. If you get your first injection:

- during the first 5 days of your period, use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) for the next 24 hours
- at any other time, you need to use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) for 7 days

How will the injection affect my period?

You can have spotting or bleeding between periods. If bleeding is heavy or doesn't stop, talk to your healthcare provider.

Your period might stop. After one year, 55 to 60 percent of women stop having a period. After 2 years, up to 68 percent of women stop having a period. This is not harmful.

What are the benefits of the injection?

- The birth control injection can be used by women who can't take estrogen because of health problems.
- One injection lasts 12 weeks.
- It may lower your risk of endometrial cancer.
- It may decrease period cramps.
- It may decrease symptoms of endometriosis, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and chronic pelvic pain.

What are the side effects of the injection?

The injection can cause:

- mild headaches
- less interest in sex
- acne
- upset stomach (nausea)
- tender breasts
- weight gain
- depression

If you have side effects, talk to your healthcare provider.

The injection can increase your risk of thinning bones (bone mineral loss). The risk may increase if you are on it for a long time. After using the injection for 2 years, talk to your healthcare provider about this.

Is there anything that increases my risk of bone mineral loss (osteoporosis)?

The risk of thinning bones is higher if you:

- have weak or brittle bones
- smoke
- have a family history of osteoporosis
- exercise very little or not at all
- have a small body frame
- eat or drink lots of caffeine or alcohol
- have an eating disorder
- take steroids (e.g., prednisone)

You can help keep your bones healthy if you:

- eat foods high in calcium and vitamin D (e.g., milk, yogurt)
- take calcium and vitamin D supplements (talk to your pharmacist)
- don't smoke
- limit alcohol and caffeine
- do weight-bearing exercises (e.g., walk, run, dance) every day

Did You Know

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- Plan ahead and decide to protect yourself to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- It is important to talk with your partner about how you can protect each other.
- When you stop the injection, it can take several months for your body to return to your regular cycle.
- You can get pregnant as soon as you stop using the injection, even if your periods are not regular.
- The injection is not affected by most medicines.
- Don't use the injection if you are pregnant or think you might be. If you want to get pregnant after using the injection, it can take up to 1 or 2 years.

What if I miss or am late for my injection?

If your last injection was **12 to 14 weeks** ago, you should still be protected from pregnancy. You need to have your injection **right away** (before 14 weeks have passed).

If your last injection was **over 14 weeks** ago and you:

Had sex with a condom or didn't have sex in the last 14 days	Had sex without a condom in the last 14 days	
	no sex in the last 5 days	sex in the last 5 days
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take a pregnancy test. 2. If the test is negative, have your next injection as soon as possible. 3. Use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) until you get your injection and for 7 days after your injection. 4. Think about getting emergency contraception if your back-up method of birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take a pregnancy test. 2. If the test is negative, have your next injection as soon as possible. 3. Use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) until you get your injection and for 7 days after your injection. 4. See your healthcare provider and take another pregnancy test in 3 weeks. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take a pregnancy test. 2. If the test is negative, emergency contraception is recommended as soon as possible for the unprotected sex in the last 5 days. 3. Have your next injection as soon as possible. 4. Use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) until you get your injection and for 7 days after your injection. 5. Think about getting emergency contraception if your back-up method of birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks). 6. See your healthcare provider and take another pregnancy test in 3 weeks.

Websites

www.myhealth.alberta.ca

www.sexualityandu.ca

www.teachingsexualhealth.ca

www.albertahealthservices.ca and search for Sexual and Reproductive Health

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area, 780-408-5465 in the Edmonton area, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

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