

# Birth Control Implant

## What is the birth control implant?

The birth control implant is a thin, plastic rod about 4 cm (1.5 in.) long. It goes just under the skin of the upper arm. It slowly releases progestin, a hormone like progesterone that the body makes, to stop the ovaries from releasing an egg. Pregnancy can't happen if no egg is released. The implant also thickens the mucous in the cervix, so it's harder for sperm to pass through. The implant doesn't contain estrogen.



## How well does the implant work?

- The implant is 99.9% effective in preventing pregnancy.
- The implant can help prevent pregnancy for up to 3 years.
- The implant doesn't protect from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.

## How do I start using the implant?

You need a prescription for the implant from your health care provider. They will numb the skin on the upper arm and then put it in just under the skin, using a special device. This takes a few minutes. A bandage will go over the area and it should be kept clean and dry for at least 24 hours.

Most implants can't be seen but can be felt under the skin. You will be shown how to feel it.

## When does the implant start working?

The implant works right away if it's inserted within the first 5 days of your period. If it's inserted any other day, use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex for 7 days.

## What are the benefits of the implant?

- If it is used for three years, it costs less than other birth control methods (e.g., pill, patch or ring).
- It may make period cramps less painful.
- It can be used if you can't use birth control with estrogen.
- It can be used while breastfeeding.
- It can be removed by a health care provider at any time, for any reason. You can get pregnant as soon as you have your implant removed.

## How will the implant affect my period?

Most people will experience changes to their period. These changes are not harmful and don't affect how well the implant works.

- It's common to have increased spotting and bleeding in the first 3 months, which often improves by 6 months. After 6 months, spotting and bleeding will not likely improve.
- More than 50% of people have a period less often or will stop having their period.
- About 25% of people will have periods more often, longer periods or both.
- About 15% of people have the implant removed due to changes in bleeding.

## What are the side effects of the implant?

Talk to a health care provider if you're concerned about side effects from the implant. These may include:

- headache
- weight gain
- acne
- tender breasts
- changes in mood
- abdominal (tummy) pain

## What are the disadvantages of the implant?

- Some people have bruising and swelling around the implant. This is common in the first 24 hours.
- The implant area could get infected.
- The implant could move from where it was inserted or get bent or broken. If this happens, a specially trained health care provider might need to take it out.
- The implant may be hard to take out. If this happens, your healthcare provider may take longer to take it out or refer you to a specially trained health care provider to remove it.

It is rare to get pregnant while using an implant. If pregnancy occurs, there is a higher risk of a pregnancy outside the uterus (ectopic pregnancy).

## I am thinking of getting an implant, what do I need to tell my health care provider?

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- are pregnant or think you might be
- don't get your period
- have irregular vaginal bleeding
- have or had breast cancer
- have growths in your liver or liver disease
- have any health conditions including lupus
- are allergic to any medications
- are taking medication(s)
- are switching from a different birth control method (e.g., pill, ring or patch)

## If I have an implant, when do I need to contact my health care provider?

Contact your health care provider if:

- you notice redness, warmth, increased pain or fluid leaking from where the implant was inserted.
- you develop a fever or a new itchy rash within 1 week of getting the implant.
- you think you are pregnant.
- the implant can't be felt under the skin as you might not be protected from pregnancy. Use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex until you can see a health care provider.
- you want to have the implant removed.

## Did you know?

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There's an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year, if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a condom every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs & HIV.
- You can help prevent HIV by taking a pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit [www.prepalberta.ca](http://www.prepalberta.ca) to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can help prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

## Websites

- [ahs.ca/srh](http://ahs.ca/srh)
- [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)
- [ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca](http://ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca)
- [sexandu.ca](http://sexandu.ca)
- [TeachingSexualHealth.ca](http://TeachingSexualHealth.ca)

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.



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