After you’ve had your baby — contraceptive choices

Helping you choose the method of contraception that is best for you
After you've had your baby — contraceptive choices

Contraception may be the last thing on your mind when you have just had a baby, but it is something you need to think about if you want to delay or avoid another pregnancy. A list of unplanned pregnancies is something you might have heard from your GP, midwife, or health visitor. You might want to use a hormonal method of contraception, such as a pill or the combined injectable, or an intrauterine device (IUD).

Questions & Answers

How soon can I have sex again?

You can have sex as soon as you feel ready. It is important to use contraception until you are sure you are not pregnant. If you are breastfeeding, you are likely to have a lower risk of pregnancy, but this is not a guaranteed method of contraception.

When will my periods start again?

If you are breastfeeding, you will not start periods until you stop breastfeeding. If you are not breastfeeding, your periods will usually start around 6 weeks after giving birth. You may experience irregular periods after giving birth.

How soon do I need to use contraception?

You can start using hormonal contraception as soon as you feel ready. However, it is recommended to use a non-hormonal method, such as condoms, until you are sure you are not pregnant.

Which contraceptive method can I use?

There are many options for hormonal contraception, such as the pill, patch, or ring. Non-hormonal methods, such as condoms or spermicides, are also available. It is important to choose a method that is right for you.

Contraceptive options

Short-term methods of contraception

If you are thinking about another baby in the next year or so, you may want to use a method that is easy to use and effective. You can choose from a variety of options, including:

- The combined oral contraceptive pill
- The progesterone-only pill
- The intrauterine device (IUD)
- The implant

Long-term methods of contraception

If you are not sure you want another baby for a longer period of time, you may want to consider a long-term method of contraception. This can include:

- Implant
- IUD

Permanently methods of contraception

If you are sure you do not want another baby, you may consider a permanent method of contraception, such as a hysterectomy or vasectomy.
Will breastfeeding act as a contraceptive?  
Breastfeeding can act as a very effective contraceptive when you are fully breastfeeding a baby under six months old. This means you must:
• Breastfeed at regular intervals, day and night
• Give your baby no other food or drink, so no breastfeeds are missed, and
• Have no periods.

Once you stop fully breastfeeding you can release an egg and get pregnant. And once your baby is over six months the risk of getting pregnant increases, so even if you continue not to have periods and are fully breastfeeding, you should use another contraceptive method.

If it is very important for you not to get pregnant, use contraception however you choose to feed your baby.

Which methods can I use if I’m breastfeeding?  
Any method except the combined pill. If you use the progesterone-only pill, a contraceptive injection or an implant, a small amount of hormone will enter the milk, but research has not shown it will harm your baby.

Rubella (German measles) test  
Many women are vaccinated against German measles (rubella) at school. During your antenatal care you will have had a blood test to see if you have had German measles. If the test showed you were not immune during your pregnancy you will probably be offered the injection after birth before you leave hospital. It is recommended not to get pregnant for one month after a rubella vaccination. Use a reliable method of contraception during this time. Do not have this vaccination if you are pregnant.

Where can I get advice?  
You can find out more about contraception while you are in hospital or from your midwife or health visitor when you get home. You and your partner can also visit your GP practice, family planning clinic or sexual health clinic.

If your GP does not provide contraceptive services, or you would prefer not to see your own GP about contraception, you can go to another GP just for contraception or to a family planning clinic.

How do I find a family planning doctor or clinic?  
Contraception is free through the National Health Service.
• You can find lists of GPs in libraries, post offices and advice centres or from helplines, health authorities or health boards.
• Doctors who give contraceptive advice have the letter ‘C’ after their names.
• You can get details of your nearest family planning or sexual health clinic from your: phone book, health centre, hospital, midwife or health visitor; advice centre, helpline, health authority or health board.

Young people can phone Brook on 0800 0185 023 for details of the nearest Brook clinic offering contraceptive advice.

You can find out about all clinics from fpa’s CES helpline on 020 7837 4044.

Emergency contraception  
If you have had sex without using contraception or think your method might have failed there are two emergency methods you can use.
• Emergency pill – must be started up to three days (72 hours) after sex. They are more effective the earlier they are started after sex.
• An IUD – must be fitted up to five days after sex.

Sexually transmitted infections  
Male and female condoms can help protect against sexually transmitted infections. Male latex condoms should carry the BS Kitemark (BS EN 600) and European CE mark. Diaphragms and caps may also protect against some sexually transmitted infections.

How fpa can help you  
fpa’s National Contraceptive Education Service (CES) Helpline is open Monday to Friday and provides:
• Confidential information and advice on contraception and sexual and reproductive health
• Details of family planning clinics, sexual health clinics and other sexual health services
• A wide range of leaflets

fpa UK  
2-12 Pentonville Road, London N1 9PH  
Phone 020 7837 4044  
9am to 5pm

fpa Cymru  
Ground Floor, Riverside House, 31 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 1ST  
Phone 0845 600 2773  
9am to 5pm

fpa Scotland  
10 St Andrew's Place, Edinburgh EH1 1YJ  
Phone 0845 600 2773  
9am to 5pm

Ask fpa for a free copy of the following leaflets:
• Your guide to contraception (all methods)
• The combined pill
• The progesterone-only pill
• Injections and implants
• The IUD
• The IUS
• Male and female condoms
• Diaphragms and caps
• Natural family planning
• Male and female sterilisation
• Emergency contraception
• A guide to family planning services

A final word  
This leaflet can only give you basic information about contraception after childbirth. The information is based on the evidence and medical opinion available at the time this leaflet was printed. Different people may give you different advice on certain points.

Remember – contact your doctor or a family planning clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.

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