your guide to contraceptive choices — after you’ve had your baby

Helping you choose the method of contraception that is best for you
Contraceptive choices — after you’ve had your baby

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 lot of unplanned pregnancies happen in the first few months after childbirth, so even if you’re not interested in sex at the moment, it is better to be prepared.

Questions & Answers

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How soon can I have sex again?

You can have sex as soon as you and your partner want to. However, having a baby causes many physical and emotional changes for both partners, and it may take some time before you feel ready to have sex. It is common to feel nervous, but there is usually no reason why you should not enjoy sex just as much as before. It can help if you and your partner talk about any worries you have.

If you have any discomfort which might affect your enjoyment of sex, such as stitches which have not healed, discuss this with your midwife, GP, nurse, or health visitor. You might want to use a vaginal lubricant if you are uncomfortably dry. If you are using latex (rubber) condoms, a diaphragm or cap you will need to use water-soluble lubricants like KY jelly and Senselle, as oil-based products such as baby oil and Vaseline will damage the rubber.
When will my periods start again?
If you bottlefeed, or combine bottle and breastfeeding, your first period could start as early as 5–6 weeks after the birth. If you are breastfeeding, your periods may not come back until you stop. However, you can be fertile before you get your first period. This is because you ovulate (release an egg) about 2 weeks before a period.

How soon do I need to use contraception?
You can become pregnant again quickly after the birth, so it’s a good idea to think about which method of contraception you are going to use before you have sex again.

You need to use contraception from 3 weeks (21 days) after the birth. Don’t wait for your periods to return, or until you have your postnatal check, before you use contraception as you could get pregnant again before then.

If you are fully breastfeeding you can choose to rely on this for contraception. (See Will breastfeeding act as a contraceptive? on page 8).

When can I start to use contraception?
You don’t need contraception until 3 weeks after the birth.

- You can use male and female condoms as soon as you want to.
- You can start to use the progestogen-only pill and the contraceptive implant from 3 weeks after the birth.
- If you are not breastfeeding then you can also use the combined pill and the contraceptive patch from three weeks.
- It is usually recommended that you wait until 6 weeks after the birth to start the
contraceptive injection because you may get heavy and irregular bleeding, but it is possible to use this earlier if there are no other alternatives you find acceptable.

- An IUD or IUS is usually fitted from 4 weeks after a vaginal or caesarean birth. Both methods can be fitted within 48 hours of the birth, but at this time there is an increased risk of them being expelled (pushed out of the womb) or going through the womb or cervix (perforation).
- You can start to use a diaphragm or cap around 6 weeks after giving birth.

**Which contraceptive method will be suitable for me?**

This depends on what you and your partner prefer, your medical history, any problems you had in the pregnancy and if you are breastfeeding.

**What are short-acting methods of contraception?**

If you think you may want to have another baby in the next year or so or you don’t want to use a long-acting method of contraception you could try a short-acting method:

- the progestogen-only pill
- the combined pill
- the contraceptive patch
- male or female condoms
- diaphragm or cap with spermicide
- natural family planning

These are all effective methods of contraception if used according to the instructions.
If you are breastfeeding then it is usually recommended that you wait until the baby is 6 months old before starting the combined pill or the contraceptive patch. This is because these methods may reduce the milk flow. If you feel there are no other suitable methods of contraception these methods can be considered from 6 weeks after the birth.

If you used a diaphragm or cap before you became pregnant, check with your doctor or clinic to make sure it still fits. This is because your cervix and vagina change shape during pregnancy and birth. If you later lose or gain more than 3kg (7lb), you must get the fitting checked again.

Natural family planning can be more difficult to learn and use just after you have had a baby. If you used this method before your pregnancy, ask your natural family planning teacher for advice.
What are long-acting methods of contraception?

If you don’t want to get pregnant again for some time one of the following long-acting methods might suit you:

- Contraceptive injection – lasts 12 weeks (Depo-Provera) or 8 weeks (Noristerat).
- Contraceptive implant – lasts 3 years.
- IUD (intrauterine device) – lasts for 3 to 10 years depending on type.
- IUS (intrauterine system) – lasts up to 5 years.

These methods are very effective. You don’t need to worry about them for as long as they work, except for attending check ups.

If you use Depo-Provera your usual fertility may not return for several months after your last injection has worn off. So if you want to get pregnant again fairly quickly this may not be the best method to choose.

Implants, an IUS or an IUD can be taken out at any time you choose and your normal fertility will return quickly.