your guide to contraceptive injections

Helping you choose the method of contraception that is best for you
Contraceptive injections

Contraceptive injections contain a progestogen hormone which is similar to the natural progesterone that women produce in their ovaries. There are 2 types of injection. Depo-Provera protects you from pregnancy for 12 weeks and Noristerat protects you for 8 weeks. Both of these are very effective hormonal methods of contraception. Depo-Provera is the most commonly used in the UK.

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How effective is a contraceptive injection?
How effective any contraceptive is depends on how old you are, how often you have sex and whether you follow the instructions.

If 100 sexually active women don’t use any contraception, 80 to 90 will become pregnant in a year. If used according to the instructions, injections are over 99% effective. This means that less than 1 woman in 100 will get pregnant in a year.

How do contraceptive injections work?
The main way they work is to stop your ovaries releasing an egg each month (ovulation). They also:

• Thicken the mucus from your cervix. This makes it difficult for sperm to move through it and reach an egg.

• Make the lining of your womb thinner so it is less likely to accept a fertilised egg.

Where can I get the injection?
Only a doctor or nurse can give you the injection. You can go to a family planning clinic or to the doctor or nurse at your general practice. If you prefer not to go to your own general practice, or they don’t provide contraceptive services, they will give you information about another practice or clinic. All treatment is free and confidential (see How do I find out about contraception services? on page 13).

Can anyone use a contraceptive injection?
Most women who want to can have a contraceptive injection. Your doctor or nurse will need to ask you about your own and your family’s medical history to make sure the injection is suitable. Do mention any illness or operations you have had. Some of the
conditions which may mean you should not use the injection are:
- you think you might already be pregnant
- you do not want your periods to change.

You have now or have had in the past:
- breast cancer
- unexplained vaginal bleeding (for example, bleeding between periods or after sex)
- thrombosis (blood clots) in any vein
- a heart attack or stroke (serious arterial disease)
- high blood pressure
- diabetes with complications or diabetes for more than 20 years
- active liver disease
- risk factors for osteoporosis (see Can I use the injection if I am at risk of osteoporosis? on page 10).

What are the advantages of the contraceptive injection?
- You don’t have to think about contraception for as long as the injection lasts.
- It doesn’t interrupt sex.
- You can use it if you are breastfeeding.
- Depo-Provera and Noristerat are not affected by other medicines.
- It may reduce heavy painful periods and help with premenstrual symptoms for some women.
- It may give you some protection against cancer of the womb.
- It gives some protection against pelvic inflammatory disease.
- It is a good method if you cannot use estrogens (hormones), like those in the combined pill.
What are the disadvantages of the contraceptive injection?

- Your periods may change in a way that is not acceptable to you (see Will the injection affect my periods? on page 7).
- Irregular bleeding may continue for some months after you stop the injections.
- Women may put on weight when they use Depo-Provera (see Will my weight be affected by the injection? on page 8).
- Other possible side-effects include headaches, abdominal pain or discomfort, dizziness, spotty skin, tender breasts, bloating, and changes in mood and sex drive.
- The injection works for 12 or 8 weeks, depending on which type you have. It cannot be removed from your body, so if you have any side-effects, you have to be prepared for them to continue during this time and for some time afterwards.
- Your periods, and fertility, may take a few months to return after stopping Depo-Provera injections. Sometimes it can take more than a year for your periods and fertility to get back to normal.
- Contraceptive injections do not protect you against sexually transmitted infections, so you may have to use condoms as well.

Are there any risks?

- Using Depo-Provera may affect your bones (see How does Depo-Provera affect my bones? on page 7).
- Research about the risk of breast cancer and hormonal contraception is complex and contradictory. Current research suggests that women who use hormonal contraception appear to have a small increase in risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to women who
don't use hormonal contraception. Further research is ongoing.

- You can have an allergic reaction to the injection, but this is very rare.
- As with any injection there is a risk of a small infection at the site of the injection.

Your doctor or nurse should discuss all risks and benefits with you.

**How does Depo-Provera affect my bones?**

- Using Depo-Provera affects your natural estrogen levels, causing thinning of the bones. This is not normally a problem for most women as the bone replaces itself when you stop the injection and it does not appear to cause any long-term problems.

- Thinning of the bones may be more of a problem for women who already have risk factors for osteoporosis (see Can I use the injection if I am at risk of osteoporosis? on page 10).

- It is also a concern for young women under 19-years-old as the body is still making bone at this age. Although young women can use Depo-Provera, it is recommended that they should first consider all other suitable methods of contraception.

**Will the injection affect my periods?**

Your periods will probably change.

- In some women periods will stop completely.
- Some women will have irregular periods or spotting (bleeding between periods), especially to begin with.
- Some women will have periods that last longer and are heavier.