An IUD is a small plastic and copper device that is put into your uterus (womb). It has one or two threads on the end. These thin threads hang through the opening at the entrance of your uterus (cervix) into the top of your vagina.

There are different types and sizes of IUD to suit different women. An IUD can stay in for 5–10 years, depending on the type. If you are aged 40 or older when the IUD is fitted, it can be left in until the menopause. It should only be fitted by a trained doctor or nurse. An IUD is sometimes called a ‘coil’.

How effective is an IUD?
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.

There are different types of IUDs. Newer IUDs contain more copper and are the most effective – over 99 per cent effective. This means less than two women in 100 will get pregnant over five years. Older IUDs have less copper and are less effective. The IUD is a method of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC). All LARC is very effective because while it is being used you do not have to remember to take or use contraception.

When will the IUD start to work?
An IUD can be put in at any time in your menstrual cycle if it is certain that you are not pregnant. It will be effective immediately.

How does an IUD work?
The main way an IUD works is to stop sperm reaching an egg. It does this by preventing sperm from surviving in the cervix, uterus or fallopian tube.
It may also work by stopping a fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus.

An IUD does not cause an abortion.

What are the advantages of an IUD?
• It works as soon as it is put in.
• It works for 5–10 years depending on the type.
• It can be used if you are breastfeeding.
• Your fertility returns to normal as soon as the IUD is taken out.
• It is not affected by other medicines.

What are the disadvantages of an IUD?
• Your periods may be heavier, longer or more painful. This may improve after a few months.
• You will need an internal examination to check the IUD is suitable, and so it can be fitted.
• The IUD does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections, so you may have to use condoms as well. The IUD does not increase your risk of infection but if you get an infection when an IUD is in place this could lead to a pelvic infection if it is not treated.

Other Headings in Leaflet
Are there any risks?
Can anyone use an IUD?
Where can I get an IUD?
How is an IUD put in?
What if I feel unwell after?
How will I know it’s still in place?
Is it safe to still use tampons?
When can the IUD be removed?
Will an IUD affect my periods?
What if I become pregnant while I am using an IUD?
... and more.

For further information see:
www.fpa.org.uk