

# Birth Control Basics

Choose what's right for you.

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Today, all women are free to choose contraceptives to stop pregnancy in the long or short term or just to regulate and control their menstrual cycles. But a pill that makes your friend have lighter periods and clearer skin may leave you feeling moody and bloated, cautions Kecia Gaither, MD, an ob-gyn based in New York City, so consult with your doctor before opting for one of the methods below.

**IUDs** The Food and Drug Administration has approved two different kinds of intrauterine devices (IUDs): hormonal and non-hormonal. Both are effective for several years. The non-hormonal IUD uses copper to prevent conception.

**Implants** These tiny, thin rods are about the size of a matchstick and are inserted under the skin of a woman's upper arm. Implants release progestin to prevent pregnancy, and its effects last for up to four years. A doctor can easily remove an implant to restore a woman's fertility.

**The Shot** Often called the Depo Shot, Depo-Provera is an injection women get from a nurse or doctor every three months. The shot uses progestin to ensure that a woman doesn't conceive.

**Vaginal Ring** This small flexible ring contains estrogen and progestin to stop ovulation and prevent pregnancy.

**The Patch** Women prevent pregnancy with this adhesive that contains estrogen and progestin; it's worn on the upper arm, stomach, butt or back every week for three weeks.

**The Pill** Oral contraceptive options include combination pills (containing estrogen and progestin), progestin-only pills and extended-cycle pills with progestin and estrogen that allow women to have just one period every three months, or even eliminate menstruation.

**Emergency Contraception** These pills work when taken within 72 to 120 hours of sex without any contraceptive. In addition, doctors can insert a copper T IUD into a woman's uterus five to seven days after she has engaged in sex without birth control.