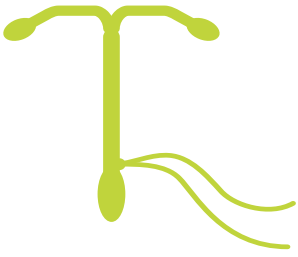


# copper intrauterine devices (IUCD)



## THE IUCD

An IUCD is a small, "T-shaped" contraceptive device which is placed in a woman's uterus (womb). It is also known as the IUD, loop or coil. IUCDs are made of flexible plastic with a coating of thin copper wire. It has one or two soft threads on the end. These thin threads hang through the opening at the entrance of your womb (cervix) into the top of your vagina.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

The IUCD is thought to work in several different ways, and through a combination of factors. Its main action is to stop sperm reaching an egg. It does this by preventing sperm from surviving in the cervix, womb or fallopian tube. It may also delay the egg coming down the fallopian tube, as well as preventing a fertilised egg from implanting in the womb.

The IUCD is also used as a form of emergency contraception.

PLEASE SEE FACT SHEET NO. 5 FOR MORE DETAILS.

## HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT?

There are different types of IUCDs – newer IUCDs contain more copper and are the most effective. They are more than 99% effective. This means less than one woman in every 100 women who use the IUCD will get pregnant in a year. Older IUCDs have less copper and are less effective. The IUCD is a long-acting reversible method of contraception. All long-acting methods are very effective because while they are being used you do not have to remember to take or use contraception.

## WHERE DO YOU GET AN IUCD?

From a family planning clinic or a general practice. Some doctors will fit IUCDs, but not all.

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

- » It works as soon as it is inserted.
- » Does not interrupt sex.
- » It is not affected by medicines.
- » The ability to become pregnant returns quickly when IUCD use is stopped.
- » Lasts for 3 to 10 years depending on type.
- » Can be used if you are breastfeeding.

## WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES?

- » Your periods may be heavier, longer or more painful. This may improve after a few months.
- » Must be inserted and removed by a trained professional.
- » You will need an internal examination to check it is suitable, and when it is fitted.
- » The IUCD does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections, so you may have to use condoms as well. If you get an infection when an IUCD is in place this could lead to a pelvic infection if it is not treated.

## WHEN AND HOW IS IT FITTED?

The IUCD must be fitted and removed by a specially trained doctor. It is fitted during your period to make sure you are not pregnant. It may also be easier to fit then as the cervix is a little softer at this time. IUCD fittings will require a special appointment, please telephone in advance.

The fitting of the IUCD can cause some discomfort. Some discomfort may be felt for a few hours afterwards, which may feel like period pain. You may get some bleeding afterwards.

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## SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR AGAIN?

You should have your IUCD checked by a doctor or nurse three to six weeks after it is put in.

You should talk to your doctor if you have any problems, worries or points that you wish to discuss. Make sure to seek an appointment if:

- » You think the device has come out.
- » You have pain with intercourse or abdominal pain.
- » You have unusual vaginal discharge and fever.
- » Your period is more than 14 days late.

## WHEN AND HOW IS IT REMOVED?

A trained doctor can take the IUCD out at any time, by pulling gently on the threads.

If you are not going to have another IUCD put in, and you don't want to become pregnant, use an extra contraceptive method, such as condoms, for seven days before the IUCD is taken out. This is to stop sperm getting into your body. Sperm can live for up to seven days inside your body and could cause a pregnancy once the IUCD is removed.

Your normal fertility returns as soon as the IUCD is taken out.

## DO I NEED TO LEAVE A BREAK BETWEEN IUCD REMOVAL AND REINSERTION?

No. If you are happy with the contraception it is possible to have a new IUCD inserted immediately after removal of the previous one. If you want to continue with this form of contraception this is the best time to have a new one fitted as many women find it is more comfortable.

## CAN IT FALL OUT?

It is possible, but not common, for the IUCD to be partially or fully expelled from the uterus, most usually in the first 3 months. Expulsion is more likely among younger women and women who have never had a baby. If it happens, a woman can become pregnant. If partially expelled, the IUCD must be removed.

It is necessary for the woman to check the strings of the IUCD regularly and if she notices them missing or shorter than usual to make an appointment with her doctor immediately.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

- » IT IS NOT COMMON, BUT THERE IS A RISK THAT AN IUCD MIGHT GO THROUGH (PERFORATE) YOUR WOMB OR CERVIX WHEN IT IS PUT IN. THIS MAY CAUSE PAIN BUT THERE ARE OFTEN NO SYMPTOMS. IF THIS HAPPENS THE IUCD MAY HAVE TO BE REMOVED BY SURGERY. THE RISK OF PERFORATION IS LOW WHEN THE IUCD IS FITTED BY AN EXPERIENCED DOCTOR.
- » If you get an infection when an IUCD is in place it could lead to a pelvic infection. The warning signs of pelvic infection are pain during or after intercourse, pain in your lower abdomen or unusual vaginal discharge, especially if you have a fever. Infection can be easily treated, but if left it can be serious and can lead to infertility. See your doctor.

- » Sexually transmitted infections are a major cause of pelvic infection. If there is a chance you have an STI you should get checked and treated before your IUCD is inserted.
- » While the risk is lower than when using no contraception, if you get pregnant with an IUCD in place, there is a possibility of this being an ectopic pregnancy. This is when a fertilised egg settles outside the womb, usually in a fallopian tube, and starts to grow. This is rare but serious. Consult your doctor straight away if you have any sudden lower abdominal pain, as well as a light or delayed period.

## WHAT ABOUT ANTIBIOTICS?

As the IUCD is not a hormonal method of contraception it is not affected by antibiotics or over the counter medications. As with any contraceptive (other than barrier methods) tell your doctor you are using them before starting a treatment.

## CAN I USE TAMPONS?

Yes, you can use either tampons or towels with an IUCD fitted.

## PREGNANCY AND THE IUCD

### IF I BECOME PREGNANT

The IUCD is a highly effective method of contraception, it is unlikely that you are pregnant. If you do get pregnant, your doctor will need to take out the IUCD whether or not you wish to continue with the pregnancy.

If you get pregnant there is always the possibility of this being an ectopic pregnancy. This is when a fertilised egg settles outside the womb, usually in a fallopian tube, and starts to grow. This is rare but serious. Consult your doctor straight away if you have any sudden lower abdominal pain or feel you may be pregnant.

If you get pregnant with an IUCD in place your doctor will usually remove the device, if possible. This reduces the risk of miscarriage though that may still happen. If you do not have a miscarriage, the IUCD will not harm the baby.

### AFTER CHILDBIRTH

If you have just had a baby, an IUCD is usually fitted from eight to twelve weeks after the birth. You will need to use another contraceptive method until then. It can also be put in within 48 hours of birth.

An IUCD can be used safely while you are breastfeeding and will not affect your milk supply.

### AFTER AN ABORTION OR MISCARRIAGE

An IUCD can be put in immediately after a miscarriage or abortion if you were pregnant for less than 24 weeks. If you had a medical abortion (using pills) an IUCD should be fitted in the first two days after the abortion is complete otherwise you will need to wait for four weeks. If it is not fitted immediately, you will need to use another method of contraception until the IUCD is put in.

TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AT AN IFPA MEDICAL CENTRE OR FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR SERVICES PLEASE CALL:

IFPA, 5-7 Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1  
T: +353 (1) 872 7088

IFPA, The Square, Tallaght, Dublin  
T: +353 (1) 459 7685

THE IFPA ALSO OPERATES A NATIONAL INFORMATION SERVICE PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND DETAILS OF STI AND CONTRACEPTIVE SERVICES IN YOUR AREA.

T: +353 (1) 8069444  
E: [post@ifpa.ie](mailto:post@ifpa.ie)

**DON'T FORGET** – THIS LEAFLET CAN ONLY OUTLINE BASIC INFORMATION ON THE IUCD. INFORMATION IS BASED ON EVIDENCE AND MEDICAL OPINION AT THE TIME OF PUBLICATION HOWEVER YOU MAY COME ACROSS CONFLICTING ADVICE ON CERTAIN POINTS. RING OR VISIT YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU ARE WORRIED OR UNSURE ABOUT ANYTHING.

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