

What is birth control?

Birth control means things you can do to ensure that pregnancy only happens if and when you want it to.

Birth control can mean abstinence. Abstinence is deciding not to do something, and abstaining from having sexual intercourse will ensure that pregnancy does not occur.

Birth control can also mean using a method of contraception to ensure that pregnancy does not occur when you do have sexual intercourse.

What causes a girl to become pregnant?

Having sexual intercourse ... when a boy's hard penis goes inside a girl's vagina - or even just touches the outside of her vagina ... is what leads to pregnancy. (There is more information on another page about having [sexual intercourse for the first time](#)).

Usually, sometime between the ages of 11 and 15, a girl begins to have periods. This shows that the ovaries have begun to produce eggs. An egg is released every month. If it does not meet up with sperm which comes out of the boy's penis during intercourse it dies. Then it leaves the body in the blood which comes out through the vagina during a girl's period every month.

If a girl has sexual intercourse with a boy - and neither of them uses contraception, then the girl could become pregnant and a baby will begin to grow inside her womb.

A girl can become pregnant:

- even if she has sex standing up
- the first time she has sex
- even if she has sex during her period
- even if a boy pulls out (or withdraws) before he comes
- if she forgets to take her pill.

If you have sexual intercourse pregnancy can be prevented by using a reliable method of contraception.

Are there many different methods of contraception?

How do you know which one to choose?

Where do you get contraceptives from?

There are a number of different methods of contraception all of which have their individual advantages and disadvantages. So as there is no clearly best method you have to decide which is most suitable for you. All forms of contraception work by preventing the fertilization of a woman's egg by a man's sperm. This can be achieved in various ways.

The first type are the barrier methods, which physically prevent sperm from swimming into the uterus and fertilizing the woman's egg. The second type are hormonal methods which alter a woman's hormonal cycle to prevent fertilization. There are the only types of contraception which are generally used by teenagers.

Other types of contraception which are generally not used by young people include the intrauterine device (IUD), which is generally not recommended for young women who have not had children; natural methods, which are often not effective enough; and sterilization which is a permanent surgical procedure.

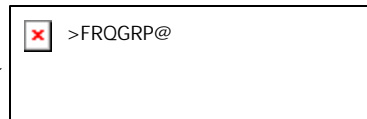
All the hormonal methods of contraception are only available from a doctor. Some barrier methods such as the IUD are also only available from a doctor, but others such as the male condom and spermicides, are widely available in most countries. Another great advantage of barrier methods of contraception is that, if used properly every time, they also provide protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as AIDS.

Barrier methods of contraception

The barrier methods of contraception generally used by teenagers are the male condom, the female condom and spermicides in the form of foam.

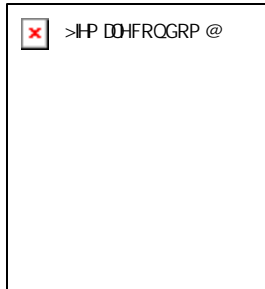
The male condom

The male condom is the only method of contraception boys can use. It's really just a rubber tube. It's closed at one end like the finger of a glove so that when a boy puts it over his penis it stops the sperm going inside a girl's body. An advantage of [using male condoms](#) is that a boy can take an active part in using contraception. It's not just left to the girl.



There is more information on other pages on this site about using condoms as well as the different types.

The female condom



The female condom is a fairly new barrier method. It is not as widely available as the male condom and it is more expensive. It is however very useful when the man either will not, or cannot use a male condom.

It's a good idea to try to practise with condoms before having sex. You can get used to touching them, and it might help you feel more confident about using them when you do have sex.

Spermicides

Spermicides are chemical agents that keep sperm from travelling up into the cervix. Spermicide comes in different forms including the sponge, vaginal pessaries which melt in the vagina, and foam which is squirted into the vagina from an aerosol. It is usually spermicide in the form of foam which is used by young people.

Spermicides are not very effective against pregnancy when used on their own, but they can be used at the same time as the male condom which is then very effective. The male condom and spermicide when used together, is a good combination for providing effective protection against both pregnancy and STDs such as AIDS.

Some condoms are also available with a spermicide (Nonoxynol 9) added. A spermicidal lubricant also aims to provide an additional level of protection of some semen happens to leak out of the condom. This can help to reduce the likelihood of pregnancy, but regular use of Nonoxynol 9 can cause an allergic reaction in some people resulting in little soars which can actually make the transmission of HIV *more* likely. Nonoxynol 9 is a suitable spermicide *only* for women who are HIV-negative and are at low risk of exposure to HIV or other STI's and *only* for vaginal sex

Hormonal methods of contraception

There are two main types of hormonal contraceptive which can be used by teens. If used properly both are extremely effective in providing protection against pregnancy. But they provide no protection at all against sexually transmitted diseases. For very good protection against both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, a hormonal method should be used at the same time as the male condom.

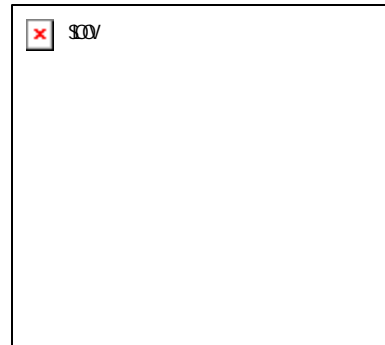
The contraceptive pill (sometimes known as the birth control pill)

- What does 'going on the pill' mean?

People often talk (particularly in the UK) about being 'on the pill'. This means they are using the oral contraceptive pill as a method of contraception. This has nothing to do with oral sex, and just means that the contraceptive is in pill form which the girl swallows.

- How does it work?

The pill contains chemicals called hormones. One type of pill called the combined pill has two hormones called Oestrogen and Progestogen. The combined pill stops the release of an egg every month - but doesn't stop periods.



The other type of pill only has Progestogen in it. It works by altering the mucous lining of the vagina to make it thicker. The sperm cannot then get through, and as the sperm can't meet the egg, the girl can't get pregnant.

- What do you do?

Usually the girl has to take one pill every day for about three weeks in every month. It is very important not to forget to take these pills. If this happens, protection against pregnancy is lost. The Progestogen-only pill also has to be taken at the same time every day.

- How effective is the pill?

It is a very effective method of contraception. If the pill is taken exactly according to the instructions, the chance of pregnancy occurring is practically nil. A disadvantage of the pill is that it does not provide any protection against STDs. For very good protection against both pregnancy and STDs, the birth control pill should be used at the same time as the male condom.

Injectable Hormonal Contraceptive

- How do you use it? How does it work?

The most popular form of this type of contraception, Depo-Provera, involves the girl having an injection once every twelve

weeks. The injection is of the hormone Progestogen. The injection works in the same way in the body as the Progestogen only pill, but has the advantage that you do not have to remember to take a pill every day.

It does however have the same disadvantage as the hormonal pill, in that it provides no protection against STDs.

Further Information

This page is part of a larger site which also includes information on on [AIDS](#), [Sex](#).
