

Contraceptive Implant



Quick Facts

Method

Hormonal

Effectiveness

More than 99%

Return to Fertility

No delay

Availability

Prescription required, with insertion and removal performed by a trained doctor



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What is it?

The contraceptive implant is a small plastic rod containing a progestogen hormone. Inserted under the skin on the inside of the upper arm, the hormone is released slowly from the implant into the bloodstream over three years.

The contraceptive implant is very flexible and not easily visible. Implanon® and Implanon NXT® are brand names of the contraceptive implant available in Australia.

How does it work?

The contraceptive implant works in three ways:

- it stops the body from releasing an ovum (egg) every month (ovulation)
- it makes the mucus in the cervix (the entrance of the uterus) thicker, so sperm cannot get through
- it changes the lining of the uterus (womb).

How effective is it?

When inserted correctly, the contraceptive implant is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy for three years.

Who can use the contraceptive implant?

The contraceptive implant is suitable for women:

- looking for reliable long-term contraception
- who cannot take oestrogen (found in most oral contraceptives and the vaginal ring)
- who have difficulty remembering to take daily contraception.

The contraceptive implant is not suitable for women:

- who think they may be pregnant
- who have had breast cancer within the last five years
- who have undiagnosed abnormal vaginal bleeding
- unable to take progestogens.

Women who have recently had a thrombosis (blood clot) in the leg or the lung should discuss this contraceptive method with a doctor before use.

Insertion and removal

The contraceptive implant is ideally inserted between day one (first day of bleeding) to day five of a woman's menstrual cycle. It may be inserted at other times after, however discussion with a doctor is needed. The contraceptive implant is effective immediately. If inserted after the fifth day of a period, other back-up contraception should be used for the next seven days (e.g. condoms).

Insertion by a doctor takes a couple of minutes. A local anaesthetic is given to numb the skin before inserting the contraceptive implant through a small hole, with no stitches required. A pressure bandage is then placed on the arm to reduce bruising. When the anaesthetic wears off some women may experience tenderness and bruising for a few days afterwards.

A small layer of tissue forms around the contraceptive implant which will keep it in place. The contraceptive implant should be easily felt by a light touch to the skin.

It is recommended that the contraceptive implant be removed and replaced every three years. It is useful to make a note of the contraceptive implant insertion date.

The contraceptive implant can be removed at any time by a doctor. It is important to consider future contraceptive needs before removing the contraceptive implant, as its contraceptive effects will cease upon removal. Your doctor can discuss this with you further.

Advantages

- Contraceptive effect lasts for three years.
- Can cause light periods or no periods at all.
- Very cost effective.
- Suitable for women who cannot take oestrogen.
- Women don't have to remember to take daily contraception.
- Not affected by stomach upsets (vomiting, diarrhoea).
- Can be removed at any time with pre-existing fertility returning rapidly.
- Does not affect a mother's ability to breastfeed and does not harm a breast-feeding infant.

Disadvantages

- Many women experience irregular bleeding.
- Few women experience frequent (usually light) bleeding.
- Some women experience side effects such as weight gain or acne.
- A small number of women have reported side effects such as mood swings, abdominal pain, painful periods.

Is there anything else I need to know?

You do not need to have a follow-up appointment with a doctor unless you are experiencing problems with the contraceptive implant.

Certain medications may reduce the contraceptive effectiveness of the implant, including St John's Wort and some which are used to treat epilepsy or tuberculosis.

The contraceptive implant does not protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

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