Birth Control

Choosing the method that's right for you

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Where to get services

This brochure is based on the latest information available. However, it is important to talk with a health care provider about which birth control method is best for you.

You can find free or low-cost family planning services in most communities. Visit your local health department or family planning clinic. Men and women can get services at both.

Look in the yellow pages of your phone book under Birth Control. Or call the Family Planning Hotline at 1-800-770-4334 for the number of the clinic nearest you. Your call is confidential.

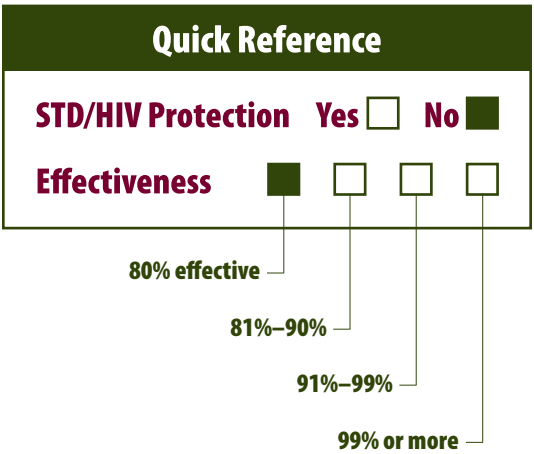
Where to get services

How to use this brochure

There are many methods of birth control. This brochure will help you choose the method of birth control that suits you best. It was developed with help from women like you.

The methods are listed in alphabetical order, from Abstinence to the Vaginal Ring. Each section features a different method—how it works, where to find it, when to use it, and its advantages and disadvantages. If you plan to get pregnant some day, there is information about when to stop using each method. There is also information about when to start birth control after you have a baby.

The Quick Reference chart at the bottom of each section shows how well a birth control method works and if it protects against sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV. This example shows a method that is 80 percent effective and does not offer protection against STD/HIV:



Questions to ask

There are several things to consider before you choose a birth control method. Think about how easy it is to use or what might get in the way of using it. You may want to get more information from your health care provider.

Here are some things to ask about the method you are considering

- How does this method work?
- How well does it work?
- Will there be side effects?
- Can I afford it?
- How easy is it to get?

Here are some questions to ask yourself about using it

- How long do I plan to use this method?
- Will I be comfortable using it?
- Do I want my partner to be aware that I'm using it?
- Will my partner like this method and help me use it?
- Can I follow the schedule for using it?
- Will I be able to use it correctly every time?

Other questions to consider

The last section of this booklet has questions about taking charge of your health. It lists twelve important things you can do to stay healthy, along with Web links and phone numbers for more information.

These choices don't work

Douching

Douching (rinsing out your vagina) doesn't work for birth control. Douching too often can harm genital skin, which can actually make it easier to get a vaginal or pelvic infection.

Feminine hygiene products

Powders, deodorants, sprays or suppositories don't work for birth control. They can be harmful to genital skin. Regular bathing is all you need to stay clean. If you have a strong vaginal odor, this may be a sign of infection. Have it checked by a health care provider.

Urinating after sexual intercourse

This doesn't work for birth control. It does help prevent urinary tract or bladder infections.

Homemade condoms made from sandwich bags or plastic wrap

These do not work for birth control. They don't fit over the penis well enough to avoid leaks around the edges.

Stopping intercourse before the woman has an orgasm

This doesn't work for birth control. A woman's orgasm doesn't have anything to do with getting pregnant.

These choices don't work

Breastfeeding
(Nursing)

It is a myth that you can't get pregnant when you are breastfeeding. You will not have your period for awhile, but you will be fertile about two weeks before your period is due to come back. Chances are you will not know you are fertile. You can get pregnant then.

Breastfeeding can work as a method of birth control, but only if you follow these three rules, without exception.

1. Make sure your baby gets all her food through breastfeeding. This means no bottles or formula or breast pumping, ever. You must nurse your baby whenever she wants you to, around the clock.
2. Do not use breastfeeding as birth control for more than six months.
3. Do not rely on breastfeeding for birth control after you have started having your periods again.

Breastfeeding will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Withdrawal
(Pulling out)

When you use withdrawal, you have sexual intercourse until your partner senses he is about to ejaculate. Then he withdraws his penis and ejaculates away from your vagina. This keeps sperm from going into your vagina.

Withdrawal has advantages. It is free and can be used any time. But it has major drawbacks, too. Withdrawal calls for great self-control, and it is difficult for some men to tell when they are going to ejaculate. Withdrawal prevents pregnancy about 75 percent of the time. By comparison, an IUD prevents pregnancy nearly all the time.

Withdrawal will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Emergency Contraceptive Pills
(ECP, Plan B®, ella®)

What do emergency contraceptive pills do?

Emergency contraceptive pills can prevent pregnancy for up to five days after you have unprotected sex. ECP are sometimes called the "morning after" pills. They are not the same as the "abortion pill." They will not work if you are already pregnant. They will not harm a developing fetus.

What is unprotected sex?

Unprotected sex is sexual intercourse without birth control, or with birth control that doesn't work.

Do emergency contraceptive pills work well?

Yes. But the sooner you take them after you have unprotected sex the better. Every hour counts!

Are emergency contraceptive pills safe?

They are extremely safe. The most common ECP contain one hormone, progestin, which is also used in birth control pills. Even if you can't use birth control pills as your regular method of birth control, you can safely use emergency contraceptive pills.

Where can I get emergency contraceptive pills?

You can get the progestin pills at the pharmacy counter or at a family planning clinic. If you are 17 or older, you don't need a prescription. You might want to have them on hand as a back-up to your regular method of birth control. Repeated use is considered safe.

A new type of emergency contraceptive pill, called ella®, is available only by prescription.

Emergency Contraceptive Pills

Abstinence

How abstinence works: It means not having sexual intercourse. If you abstain from sexual intercourse you will not get pregnant.

When you can use it: At any point in your life you can decide not to have sexual intercourse. If you change your mind, you must choose another birth control method if you don't want to get pregnant.

Advantages: There are no health risks with abstinence, and it's free. As long as your genitals don't touch your partner's genitals, you are not likely to get pregnant or to get a sexually transmitted disease.

Disadvantages: Abstinence offers no protection if you change your mind and decide to have sexual intercourse. You must have another birth control method nearby. Remember that you can get some sexually transmitted diseases even if you don't have vaginal intercourse. You can be infected through oral sex or skin-to-skin contact, like rubbing or fondling each other's genitals.

To plan a pregnancy: Simply stop being abstinent. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: You can choose to be abstinent right after you have a baby.

Quick Reference: Abstinence				
STD/HIV Protection	Yes ☐		No ■	
Effectiveness	■	■	■	■

Birth Control Pills
(The Pill)

How birth control pills work: Birth control pills contain hormones like the sex hormones produced by your own body—estrogen and progesterone. ("Mini-pills" have only progesterone.) The pill works by stopping the release of eggs from your ovaries.

When: You usually start using birth control pills at the beginning of your period. You must take a birth control pill every day, at about the same time of day, for it to work.

Where: By prescription. Talk with your health care provider or go to a family planning clinic.

Advantages: Birth control pills are easy to use. Your periods might be more regular, lighter, and less painful. Years of study show that birth control pills lower the risk of ovarian, uterine and colorectal cancer later in life. The pill can also help clear up pimples.

Disadvantages: The pill must be taken every day at the same time. It will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: Most women have no major side effects with birth control pills. Some women notice minor side effects, but these usually stop after a couple of months. If they don't, you might want to try another kind of birth control pill. Serious problems with the pill are rare in healthy women. You should not take the pill if you have major health problems like high blood pressure, breast cancer or a blood clotting disorder.

To plan a pregnancy: When you finish a package of pills, simply do not start another. Your natural cycle of periods will start again in four to six weeks. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: If you decide to breastfeed your baby, talk to your health care provider about birth control pills. You may be able to use the "mini-pill" while you are nursing. If you are not breastfeeding, you can begin taking the pill about two weeks after you have a baby.

Quick Reference: The Pill				
STD/HIV Protection	Yes ☐	No ■		
Effectiveness	■	■	■	☐

Cervical Barriers
(Diaphragm, FemCap®, Lea's Shield®)

How cervical barriers work: A diaphragm is a small rubber cup that you fill with spermicidal jelly or cream. You place it in your vagina, making sure your cervix is covered, before you have sexual intercourse. It prevents sperm from entering your uterus. Other styles of cervical barriers, like the cap and the shield, fit more closely over your cervix.

When: A barrier can be inserted a few hours before you have sexual intercourse. It must be left in place for a while afterwards. Follow the directions on the package about how long to leave it in.

Where: By prescription. You can be fitted for a cervical barrier by your health care provider or at a family planning clinic.

Advantages: No hormones or chemicals will go into your body. Your period will not change. Cervical barriers are reusable.

Disadvantages: Cervical barriers must always be put in the right way. Plan ahead to do this. Cervical barriers will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: A few people may be allergic to the material a cervical barrier is made of, or the spermicidal jelly or cream that is used with it. If you have itching or burning after using a cervical barrier, talk with your health care provider.

To plan a pregnancy: Simply stop using the cervical barrier. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: You may need a different size cervical barrier after you have a baby, or if you lose or gain a lot of weight. Get refitted about eight weeks after you have a baby. Use another birth control method until you can use a cervical barrier again. Cervical barriers do not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: Cervical Barriers

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ■	☐ ☐

Condoms

How male condoms work:
Male condoms are thin and disposable. They fit over a man's erect penis. If the condom is put on the right way, sperm will be trapped inside the condom and will not get into your vagina. Use a new condom each time you have sexual intercourse. A water-based lubricant will feel good and help keep the condom from breaking.

How female condoms work:
Female condoms are made of thin plastic and are disposable. They are a soft and loose-fitting pouch with a flexible ring at each end. The ring at the closed end is used to put the condom into your vagina. The larger ring stays outside your vagina and helps to protect your labia during sexual intercourse. A water-based lubricant will increase your comfort and reduce damage to the condom. Use a new one each time you have sexual intercourse.

Where: Over-the-counter. Male and female condoms can be found at most drugstores, grocery stores and family planning clinics. You can also order them from pharmacy websites. You don't need a prescription.

Advantages: Both male and female condoms will protect you from most sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Male condoms don't cost a lot. Female condoms cost a little bit more.

Disadvantages: Condoms must be kept close at hand, and must be used the right way every time. Sometimes condoms break or come off.

Side effects: A few people may be allergic to latex or the liquid used to package the condom. Other people may be allergic to the spermicide that is put on some brands of condoms. If you have itching or burning after using a condom, try changing brands. If the problem continues, talk with your health care provider.

To plan a pregnancy: Simply stop using condoms. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: Male and female condoms can be used as birth control as soon as needed after you have a baby. Condoms do not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: Condoms

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ■	**No** □
Effectiveness	■ ■	□ □

Fertility Awareness
(Natural family planning)

How fertility awareness works: By keeping careful track of changes in your body, you can know when you are fertile and when you are not. You are not likely to get pregnant if you have sexual intercourse on the days you are not fertile. There are several slightly different ways of telling when you are fertile.

Natural family planning products: Many women use a string of 32 colored beads, called Cycle Beads®, to keep track of their fertile days. There are also electronic devices and calendars to help keep track of changes.

When: Every day, without fail, you must clearly record several body signs and follow all the rules of natural family planning for this method to work.

Where: By a trained expert. You need to learn to check your natural vaginal discharge and your body temperature.

Advantages: There are no health risks with fertility awareness. Your period will not change. No hormones or chemicals will be taken into your body.

Disadvantages: Keeping a daily record can be difficult, and some couples find it hard to avoid having sexual intercourse when the woman is fertile. Fertility awareness will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

To plan a pregnancy: Women who use fertility awareness say they are very aware of their bodies, and this helps them get pregnant. Knowing when you are fertile improves your chances of getting pregnant.

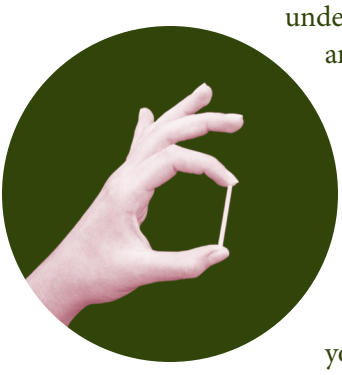
After a birth: This will not be a good time to learn fertility awareness because your periods won't be regular. Learn natural family planning before you get pregnant and be ready with another birth control method until your periods are regular. Fertility awareness does not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: Fertility Awareness

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ☐ ☐ ☐	

Implants
(Implanon®)

How the implant works: It is a single, soft plastic rod, about the size of a matchstick, which is placed just under the skin of your inner arm. An implant contains the hormone progesterone, which will be absorbed in tiny amounts by your body over the course of three years. You will not get pregnant because no eggs will be released from your ovaries.



When: An implant can be put in anytime, as long as you are certain you are not pregnant.

Where: Your health care provider can put an implant in place during an office visit or you can visit a family planning clinic. An implant must be inserted and removed by a health care provider who has had special training.

Advantages: If you have an implant, you do not have to think about using birth control every time you have sexual intercourse. The implant can keep you from getting pregnant for up to three years. It is convenient and private.

Disadvantages: An implant can be difficult to remove, and an experienced health care provider must do it. It is possible for the site where the implant was put in or taken out to get infected. This rarely happens. The implant does not protect you against sexually transmitted disease or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: Your periods will change. Bleeding will become irregular or spotty. Some women stop having periods after a few months. This is safe.

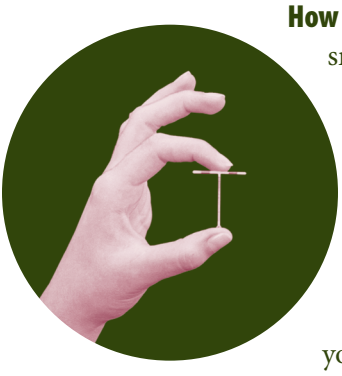
To plan a pregnancy: Go to your health care provider or a family planning clinic to have the implant removed. Your natural cycle of periods should begin again four to six weeks after the implant is removed. You can try to get pregnant right way.

After a birth: You can get an implant about a month after you have a baby. If you plan to breastfeed, wait until your milk supply is established. Use another birth control method until you can get another implant.

Quick Reference: Implants

STD/HIV Protection	Yes ☐	No ■
Effectiveness	■ ■ ■ ■	

Intrauterine Device (IUD)
(ParaGard®)



How this IUD works: It is a small piece of plastic that is wrapped with copper and put in your uterus. Copper kills sperm.

When: An IUD is put into your uterus during your period, or whenever you are certain you are not pregnant. The health care provider who inserted it might want to examine you again three months after it is put in place.

Where: You can get an IUD through your health care provider or at a family planning clinic. Your IUD must be put in and taken out by a health care provider with special training.

Advantages: If you have an IUD, you do not have to think about using birth control every time you have sexual intercourse. The IUD can keep you from getting pregnant for up to ten years. No hormones or chemicals will go into your body, and your period will stay on its usual cycle. The IUD is private. No one will be able to tell you have it.

Disadvantages: It is possible to pierce the wall of the uterus or get an infection when an IUD is inserted. This rarely happens. Once in a while, an IUD can come out of a woman's uterus. This occurs more often among women who have never been pregnant. An IUD will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: Some women have longer, heavier periods and cramps when they have an IUD.

To plan a pregnancy: Go to your health care provider or visit a family planning clinic to have the IUD removed. Your natural cycle of periods will begin again after the IUD is removed. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: You can have an IUD put in soon after you have a baby. Talk with your health care provider about timing. Use another birth control method until your IUD is in place. An IUD does not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: IUD				
STD/HIV Protection	Yes ☐	No ■		
Effectiveness	■	■	■	■

Intrauterine System (IUS)
(Mirena®)

How this IUD works: The Mirena® IUS is a T-shaped plastic device that contains the hormone progesterone. It is placed in your uterus, and the progesterone is very slowly released. The IUS affects your ovaries and the lining of your uterus. Most of the hormone stays in your uterus.

When: The IUS is put into your uterus during your period, or whenever you are certain you are not pregnant. The health care provider who inserted it might want to examine you again three months after it is put in place.

Where: You can get an IUS through your health care provider or at a family planning clinic. It must be inserted and removed by a health care provider with special training.

Advantages: If you have an IUS, you do not have to think about using birth control every time you have sexual intercourse. The IUS can keep you from getting pregnant for up to five years. Your periods will be lighter and less painful. The IUS is private. No one will be able to tell you have it.

Disadvantages: It is possible to pierce the wall of the uterus or get an infection when an IUS is inserted. This rarely happens. Once in a while, an IUS can come out of a woman's uterus. This occurs more often among women who have never been pregnant. An IUS will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: Some women who use an IUS stop having periods. This is safe. During the first three to six months, spotting and bleeding can occur.

To plan a pregnancy: Go to your health care provider or visit a family planning clinic to have the IUS removed. Your natural cycle of periods will begin again after the IUS is removed. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: The IUS should not be inserted until at least six weeks after you have a baby. Use another birth control method until your IUS is in place. An IUS does not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: IUS				
STD/HIV Protection	Yes ☐		No ■	
Effectiveness	■	■	■	■

Patch

How the patch works: The patch is about half the size of a credit card. You can wear it on your bottom, your belly, your torso, or your upper arm, but not on your breast. It contains hormones like the sex hormones produced by your own body. It works like birth control pills to prevent pregnancy. The patch sends steady levels of hormones through your skin and into your bloodstream. The hormones stop eggs from being released from your ovaries, so you can't get pregnant.

When: Start using a patch at the beginning of your period. You will change to a new patch each week, on the same day of the week, for three weeks. During the fourth week you won't wear a patch. You should get your period during that fourth week. Then you start over.

Where: By prescription. Talk with your health care provider or go to a family planning clinic.

Advantages: The patch is easy to use. Your periods may be more regular, lighter, and less painful. The patch can also help clear up pimples.

Disadvantages: Women who use the patch absorb more estrogen than women who use birth control pills. For some women, the chance of side effects may be increased by this. The patch will not protect you from sexually transmitted disease or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: Most women have no major side effects with the patch. Some women notice minor side effects, but these usually stop after a few months. If side effects don't stop, talk with your health care provider. Serious problems with the patch are rare in healthy women.

You should not use the patch if you have major health problems like high blood pressure, breast cancer or a blood clotting disorder.

To plan a pregnancy: Simply do not start another one after finishing a package of patches. Your natural cycle of periods will begin again in four to six weeks. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: If you are breastfeeding your baby, you should not use the patch. If you are not breastfeeding, you can begin using the patch about two weeks after having a baby. Use another birth control method until you can start using the patch again.

Quick Reference: Patch

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ■ ■ ☐	

Shot
(Depo-Provera®)

How the 3-month shot works: It is an injection of the hormone progesterone. It is slowly absorbed by your body and stops any eggs from leaving your ovaries, so you cannot get pregnant. Each injection works for twelve weeks.

When: The shot can be started any time, as long as you are certain you are not pregnant.

Where: By appointment. The shot can be given by your health care provider or at a family planning clinic.

Advantages: The shot is very effective, if you always get it right on time. It is a private method. No one can tell you are using it.

Disadvantages: The effects of the shot cannot be reversed once it has been given. It wears off after twelve weeks. The shot will lower your natural estrogen levels and might decrease the strength of your bones. This is important! Talk to your health care provider about it. The shot does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use condoms for protection.

Side effects: Your periods will change with the shot. After a few shots, many women will stop having periods altogether. This is safe. Some women experience other minor side effects.

To plan a pregnancy: Your natural cycle of periods may not begin again for six to twelve months after your last shot. You can try to get pregnant right away, but it might take longer for success.

After a birth: If you plan to breastfeed your baby, wait until your milk supply is established. Use another method of birth control until you can get the next shot. If you are not planning to breastfeed, you can get the shot as soon as five days after you have a baby.

Quick Reference: Shot		
STD/HIV Protection	Yes ☐	No ■
Effectiveness	■ ■ ■ ☐	

Spermicides

How spermicides work: Spermicides are chemicals that kill sperm. They come in several forms, such as spermicidal jelly, cream, film or foam.

When: Some spermicides are used with cervical barriers such as the diaphragm. Others are used alone. If you use a spermicide by itself, you must apply more of it every time you have sexual intercourse.

Where: Over-the-counter. You can get spermicides at drugstores, grocery stores, and family planning clinics. You can also order them from pharmacy websites. You don't need a prescription.

Advantages: Spermicides are simple to use. They are easy to keep on hand. They do not contain any hormones. You will not absorb hormones or chemicals into your body when you use a spermicide. Your periods won't change.

Disadvantages: Spermicides will not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection. If you use a spermicide more than two times a day, your vagina can become irritated. This increases your risk of getting sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

Side effects: Some women are allergic to spermicide. If you have itching or burning after using spermicide, try changing brands. If the problem continues, talk with your health care provider.

To plan a pregnancy: Simply stop using spermicide. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: Spermicides can be used as soon as you need to after having a baby. Spermicides do not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: Spermicides

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ☐ ☐ ☐	

Sponge

How the sponge works: It is a small foam pillow soaked in spermicide. Moisten it with tap water to activate the spermicide. Then place it deep in your vagina, over your cervix. The foam and spermicide will trap and absorb sperm before the sperm have a chance to enter your cervix.

When: Put a sponge in your vagina before you have sexual intercourse. It will work for up to 24 hours. Wait until at least six hours after sexual intercourse to take the sponge out. Do not leave it in your vagina for more than 30 hours, total. You can use the sponge anytime in your cycle. Use a new sponge each time you have sexual intercourse.

Where: Over-the-counter. The sponge is sold at many drugstores and grocery stores. You can also order them from pharmacy websites. You don't need a prescription.

Advantages: One size fits all with the sponge. It is easy to insert and allows for as many acts of sexual intercourse as you like within a 24-hour period. No chemicals or hormones will be absorbed into your body. Your periods won't change.

Disadvantages: The sponge does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection. The sponge does not work as well for women who have had a baby as it does for women who have not.

Side effects: Some people are allergic to the spermicide in the sponge. If you have itching or burning after using the sponge, you may have to use another birth control method. Talk with your health care provider about other methods.

To plan a pregnancy: Simply stop using the sponge. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: You can use the sponge six weeks after you have a baby. Use another birth control method until you can use the sponge again. The sponge does not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: Sponge

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ☐ ☐ ☐	

Sterilization

How sterilization works: Both men and women can be sterilized by having an operation that permanently blocks part of the reproductive system. If a couple has sexual intercourse and one of them is sterilized, the woman will not get pregnant.

A man gets a vasectomy. His two sperm tubes will be blocked so sperm cannot pass through his penis. Right after the vasectomy, a man will still have some sperm in his tubes, so he should use another birth control method until a check-up with a health care provider shows there are no sperm left in his tubes. It is cheaper and safer for a man to be sterilized than it is for a woman.

A woman gets a tubal ligation. Her two fallopian tubes are blocked so eggs cannot pass through them to be fertilized by sperm. A tubal ligation is effective right away. Tubal ligation can be done several ways, and new ways are being found to make this operation easier. Talk this over with a health care provider.

When: Sterilization can be done at any time. Be absolutely certain you don't want to have a child, or any more children, before you take this step. Sterilization is permanent.

Where: For a man, the surgery for a vasectomy can be done at a clinic or day-surgery center. For a woman, the surgery for a tubal ligation is done at a hospital.

Advantages: Once sterilization is done, it's done. You won't need to use another birth control method. There are programs that can pay for sterilization.

Disadvantages: There are some risks in having minor surgery. Talk with your health care provider about this. If you do not have health insurance, the surgery may be expensive. Sterilization does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: After the surgery, there should be no side effects. Your sex drive will not change. A woman will still be able to have orgasms and her natural cycle of periods will not change. A man will still be able to have erections and ejaculate, but no sperm will be in the fluid.

To plan a pregnancy: Pregnancy is no longer possible after a woman is sterilized. Sterilization is permanent.

After a birth: A woman can easily be sterilized right after a birth, even before she leaves the hospital. Sterilization does not affect breastfeeding.

Quick Reference: Sterilization

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ■ ■ ■	

Vaginal Ring

How the vaginal ring works: It is a soft, plastic ring, about two inches across, that you put in your vagina. When in place, the ring releases a steady, low dose of sex hormones. The ring works like birth control pills to prevent pregnancy. It stops any eggs from leaving your ovaries.

When: Start using the vaginal ring at the beginning of your period. Leave the vaginal ring in place for three weeks. Then take it out. You should get your period two or three days after you take it out. After one week, put in a new vaginal ring.

Where: By prescription. Talk with your health care provider.

Advantages: The vaginal ring is easy to use. Your periods may be more regular, lighter, and less painful when you use it. The hormones can help clear up pimples.

Disadvantages: The vaginal ring does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV. Use a condom for protection.

Side effects: Some women notice minor side effects with the vaginal ring, but these usually stop after a couple of months. If side effects don't stop, talk with your health care provider. Serious problems are rare in healthy women. You should not use the vaginal ring if you have major health problems like high blood pressure, breast cancer or a blood clotting disorder.

To plan a pregnancy: After finishing a three-week cycle with the vaginal ring, simply do not start a new one. Your natural cycle of periods will begin again in four to six weeks. You can try to get pregnant right away.

After a birth: If you are breastfeeding, you should not use the vaginal ring. If you are not breastfeeding, you can begin using it about two weeks after you have a baby. Use another birth control method until then.

Quick Reference: Vaginal Ring

STD/HIV Protection	**Yes** ☐	**No** ■
Effectiveness	■ ■ ■ ☐	

Make a change for yourself… make a change for the better

Ask yourself:

Am I active enough?
To get the most out of exercise, be active 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Everyday activities such as brisk walking are effective and free. At least twice a week, try to do muscle strengthening exercises such as yoga, hand weights, sit-ups, or push-ups. Exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight, sleep better, reduce stress, and lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. **www.doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/nutritionandphysicalactivity/ActiveLiving.aspx**

Could I be eating better?
Build your meals around fresh vegetables, fruits, and other foods high in calcium and fiber, such as leafy greens, whole grains, and low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Craving fat, salt, sugar, or caffeine? Try to avoid too much of them and remember that those foods only make you feel good for a short time. Focus on healthier foods and you will not only feel better, you will reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. **www.doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/nutritionandphysicalactivity/HealthyEating.aspx**

Why do I need a daily multivitamin?
Your body needs vitamins to function and you don't always get enough through meals. Two important ones for women are folic acid and vitamin D. Folic acid is a B vitamin that your body needs daily to make healthy new cells and prevent birth defects. Vitamin D helps your body build healthy bones. One way to get the recommended amount is to take a daily multivitamin. Make sure the label says 400 mcg or 100% next to folic acid and includes at least 600 IU of vitamin D3. **www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/basics/vitamins/**

How are my teeth?
Oral health is an essential part of general health. Problems with teeth, gums, or other parts of the mouth can be related to other serious illnesses—like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and floss daily. **www.doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/oralhealth/FindingDentalCare.aspx**

Does it run in the family?
Some diseases, like diabetes, heart disease, and osteoporosis, may run in your family. Ask your family about their health. Keep a record of your family's health history and share it with your doctor. It's good to know now what your risks are and what you can do about them. Let your doctor know if you are adopted or do not know your family's health history. **www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/**

How often should I see my doctor?
You should try to see your doctor every year or two for a check-up and to get the immunizations and tests you need, such as regular Pap and STD tests. Your doctor can help you stay healthy through prevention, screening, and treatment. Screening offers lifesaving opportunities to prevent health problems or catch them at an early stage, when they can be treated most easily. **www.womenshealth.gov/prevention/**

Am I getting enough sleep?
With your busy life, it is sometimes difficult to find the time to get enough sleep but you should be getting at least 7–9 hours of sleep every night. Not getting enough sleep may increase your risk of depression, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. **www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/index.htm**

Could my sadness actually be depression?
Everybody feels sad sometimes, but sadness that goes on for more than 2 weeks can affect your relationships, your work, and your life. It may be a sign of depression. Talk to someone you trust if you feel sad. Your mental health is essential to your overall health. If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for help: **1-800-273-8255**.

Are my relationships safe?
Women who have trusting, honest, and respectful relationships are healthier. Relationships won't always be free of anger or hurt, but you should not feel scared, humiliated, or controlled. Examine your relationships. If you feel you are in an abusive relationship of any kind, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline for help: **1-800-799-7233**.

Am I protecting myself?
If you are sexually active, take charge and prevent unintentional pregnancy, STDs, and HIV. Protect yourself and choose birth control that's right for you. If your birth control method fails, know your options, including emergency contraception. For more information, call the Washington State Family Planning Hotline: **1-800-770-4334**.

How can I get help to quit smoking?
Quitting smoking isn't easy but it is one of the best things you can do for your health. There are effective and free resources, such as the Quit Line, available to help you quit. Being around a smoker is also harmful to your health. Avoid secondhand smoke. To get help for you or a friend, call Washington's confidential Tobacco Quit Line for support: **1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)**.

How much is too much to drink?
Drinking too much alcohol can lead to serious health problems or injuries. Women should limit their use to 1 drink per day. One drink equals: 1 beer (12 oz), or 1 glass of wine (5 oz), or 1 shot of 80-proof hard liquor (1.5 oz) in a mixed drink. If you are concerned about your drinking, call the Washington Recovery Help Line: **1-866-789-1511** or visit **www.warecoveryhelpline.org/**.

Am I abusing drugs?
Sometimes drug abuse is not obvious. You may have started a medication, like pain killers, and now you cannot stop. If you are misusing over-the-counter or prescription medications or using illegal drugs, help is available for you. the Washington Recovery Help Line: **1-866-789-1511** or visit **www.warecoveryhelpline.org/**.

The information in this brochure is not meant to take the place of a visit with a trained health care provider. The products listed in this brochure were those available at the time of publication. Use of brand names is for educational purposes only and is not an endorsement of the manufacturer or the product by the state of Washington or the Department of Health.

Washington State Department of Health
Prevention and Community Health
Office of Healthy Communities
http://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/ProgramsandServices/PreventionandCommunityHealth/OfficeofHealthyCommunities.aspx

For persons with disabilities this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 711).

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