

THINK

your guide to contraception

thinkcontraception.ie

Your guide to choosing the right contraception for you.

When it comes to your sexual health, nobody else is going to do the thinking for you, so it's important to choose contraception that fits your situation and lifestyle.

In this leaflet, you'll find info on how to protect yourself and your partner from having an unplanned pregnancy and how to prevent against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as descriptions of the main types of contraception available. Read on and then have a chat with your doctor and your partner about what's best for you. And remember, above all, to always think contraception. All the methods are very effective and most are 99% effective - when used correctly and consistently.

Remember, only total abstinence from all sexual contact offers 100% protection from pregnancy and STIs.

Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet has been supplied by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. The Agency has made every effort to ensure that the information is accurate, including medical proofing before going to print. The information contained in this leaflet must not, however, be taken to be a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. If you have questions or concerns or require further information, visit your GP or local family planning clinic for professional advice.

About the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency is a planning and coordinating body established to formulate and implement a strategy to address the issue of crisis pregnancy in Ireland. For more information, visit crisispregnancy.ie.

Age of Consent

The age of sexual consent in Ireland is 17 years.

Top Tips

- Think contraception before you think about having sex! Most contraception methods are 99% effective, when used correctly and consistently, however, only total abstinence offers 100% protection from pregnancy and STIs.
- Different contraceptives suit different people. Discuss your contraceptive choices with your GP. You may need to experiment to find the best contraception for you.
- Discuss contraception with your partner before you get intimate.
- Practising 'Double Dutch' (using condoms with another method of contraception) will help you to have safer sex.
- Over 90% of 18-24 year olds used contraception the last time they had sex (ISSHR, 2006), so plan ahead and carry contraception.
- Be prepared - the most common reasons cited by 18-24 year olds who did not use contraception at most recent sexual intercourse were drinking alcohol/taking drugs, that sex was not planned/unexpected or there was no contraception available (ISSHR, 2006).
- Protect yourself, be safe and look after your sexual health. Nobody else is going to do the thinking for you.



CONDOMS: MALE AND FEMALE

how it works

These barrier methods work by preventing the man's sperm meeting the woman's egg.

The male condom is rolled onto a man's erect penis before sex and the female condom lines the woman's vagina.

how effective is it

Effectiveness depends on careful and consistent use.

With careful use, the male condom is 98% effective and the female condom 95% effective.

choosing this method

Condoms are widely available for sale without a prescription.

Help to protect both partners from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Can be used with hormonal contraceptives for additional protection. Must be correctly and consistently used. Using condoms properly requires practice.



COMBINED ORAL CONTRACEPTION: THE PILL

how it works

This pill containing two female hormones (oestrogen and progestogen) is taken every day for three weeks of each month and works mainly by stopping the woman producing an egg.

how effective is it

If properly used, it is over 99% effective. Higher failure rate with less careful use. Must be taken consistently every day.

choosing this method

Not available without prescription.

Not suitable for women with conditions such as high blood pressure or smokers over 35.

Vomiting, diarrhoea and some medicines such as antibiotics can interfere with how it works.

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.



PROGESTOGEN ONLY PILL: THE MINI-PILL

how it works

This pill containing one female hormone (progestogen) is taken every day without a break. It works mainly by preventing sperm getting through the fluid at the neck of the womb. It may also thin the lining of the womb preventing an egg from implanting there and may prevent an egg being released.

how effective is it

Effectiveness depends on careful and consistent use. **96-99% effective with very careful use.** Must be taken at the same time every day.

choosing this method

Not available without prescription.

Useful for women who cannot or do not want to take oestrogen.

Can be used when breastfeeding.

May cause irregular periods.

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.



INJECTABLE CONTRACEPTION: THE INJECTION

how it works

An injection of a single hormone is given every 12 weeks and works mainly by stopping the woman producing an egg.

how effective is it

Very effective (over 99%) once the injection is given regularly.

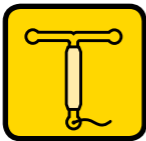
choosing this method

Particularly useful for those who find it hard to remember to take a pill every day.

Injection must be given by a doctor or a nurse.

May cause irregular bleeding patterns.

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.



INTRAUTERINE SYSTEM (IUS)

how it works

A small plastic device that releases the hormone progestogen is put into the womb.

It works in several different ways - by stopping sperm from meeting the egg, by delaying the egg getting to the womb or by preventing the egg from implanting in the womb.

how effective is it

Highly effective (more than 99%).

choosing this method

Works as soon as it is inserted and can stay in place for five years.

May cause irregular bleeding for the first few months.

Insertion and removal must be done by a specially trained doctor.

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.



THE IMPLANT

how it works

A small flexible rod containing the hormone progestogen is inserted under the skin of the upper arm.

It works mainly by stopping the woman producing an egg but also thickens the fluid at the neck of the womb and thins the lining of the womb.

how effective is it

Highly effective (over 99%).

choosing this method

Lasts for up to three years.

Insertion and removal must be done by a specially trained doctor.

May cause irregular bleeding patterns.

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.



THE PATCH

how it works

A thin patch containing two hormones (oestrogen and progestogen) is applied to the skin each week for three weeks with a week off each month.

It works like the combined oral contraceptive pill.

how effective is it

99% effective when used correctly.

choosing this method

Has the same effects as the combined oral contraceptive pill.

May be easier to remember (once a week).

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.

Costs more than the pill.

Not available without prescription.



VAGINAL RING

how it works

The ring containing two hormones (oestrogen and progestogen) is inserted into the vagina for three weeks of every month.

It works like the combined oral contraceptive pill.

how effective is it

99% effective when used correctly.

choosing this method

Has the same effects as the combined oral contraceptive pill.

Is easier to remember (once a month).

Can be inserted by the woman herself.

Costs more than the pill.

Not available without prescription.

Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections.

Emergency Contraception

If you have had sex without using contraception or if you think your method might have failed (e.g. burst condom or forgotten pill), you can use emergency contraception. This will usually stop you becoming pregnant.

Emergency contraception can be obtained through your GP, local doctor or a family planning clinic.

Most doctors prescribe emergency contraception but if you are unsure ring to ask.

The emergency contraception pill can be taken up to 72 hours after unprotected sex, but the sooner it's taken the more effective it is.

Emergency contraception is for emergencies only and should not be used as your regular method of contraception.

Make the Right Choice For You

It is your right to determine when, with whom, how and where you want to have sex.

It is your right to make your own choices.

It is your right to abstain from sexual activity.

It is your right to protect yourself from pregnancy and disease.

It is your right to enjoy yourself.

It is your responsibility to ensure you carry and use contraception. Nobody else is going to do the thinking for you, not even your partner.

Facts

Fact: You can get pregnant if the man comes near or around the woman's genitals or even if the man pulls out before he comes.

Fact: You can get pregnant even if it's the first time you have had sex.

Fact: Up to 86% of women and 50% of men with gonorrhoea have no symptoms (HPSC, 2008).

Fact: In the space of ten years, there has been a 700% increase in cases of Chlamydia in Ireland (HPSC, 2008).

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

65% of reported cases of STIs are among 20-29 year olds (where age is recorded).

(Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), 2008)

Condoms offer protection against the majority of STIs, however, only total abstinence from all sexual contact offers 100% protection from pregnancy and STIs.

Get advice from your doctor, a family planning clinic, an STI clinic or genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic if you are worried about STIs or are sexually active and notice any of the following symptoms:

- Unusual discharge from penis or vagina
- Pain when passing urine
- Unusual sores or blisters in the genital area
- Itching or irritation in the genital area
- Pain during sex

(HSE, 2007)

Once diagnosed, most STIs (except for HIV) can be cured with treatment. It is, however, important to get treatment early, as some can have long term effects.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency would like to acknowledge and thank both the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) for providing information for use in this leaflet.

STI Screening

It is good sexual health practice to get an STI check regularly. Your doctor can arrange tests for you or you can also visit a family planning clinic, an STI clinic or genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic.

What happens at the clinic?

You will need to make an appointment for most clinics, unless they provide a drop-in service. You don't have to be referred by or have a letter from your GP. The service is confidential. This means that you are identified by a number rather than by your name.

An STI screening can take around two hours. First, a doctor will take your sexual history. Don't worry about shocking them - they've heard it all before. Then you will have a series of tests. Blood tests are used to test for HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis. Swabs are used to examine material from a discharge or an infected area. If you are having a HIV test, an advisor will talk you through it.

You may receive some results while you are at the clinic. If you need treatment, they will give you the medication there and then. A sexual health advisor will meet you to explain safer sex practices, answer any questions you may have and discuss your results. You will get another appointment to come back for the rest of your results.

(HSE, 2007)

How to use a Male Condom

Condoms are the most common form of contraception used by 18-24 year olds (ISSHR, 2006). Male condoms are really effective when they are used properly AND they protect against most (but not all) STIs. It takes a little practice to use one properly - here are some tips:

- When buying a condom, make sure it is a good quality condom. Look for the BSI Kitemark or CE mark, and check the expiry date.
- Be careful that condoms don't tear when opening the packet - don't use your teeth and be careful with long nails and jewellery.
- Put the condom on before there is any genital contact or penetration - there can be semen on the penis before ejaculation.
- Don't try to put a condom on if the penis is not hard.
- Hold the condom at the head of the penis.



- Pinch the top of the condom to get rid of any air and with your other hand gently roll it down over the penis.



- Oil-based lubricants (massage or baby oil, petroleum jelly) and products such as body cream can damage condoms making them split. Water-based lubricants are designed especially for use with condoms. Most pharmacies stock these products close to the condom range.



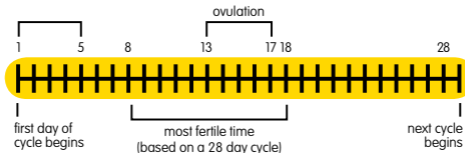
- When pulling out after sex, hold the base of the condom and be careful when removing the condom so that you don't spill any semen. There will still be semen on the penis so keep it away from the vagina.
- Wrap the condom and dispose of it safely and hygienically (not down the toilet).

A variety of condom types are available. If one condom doesn't feel comfortable, check out other condom options.

Fertility

Lots of people do not know when a woman's most fertile time in her cycle is (the time when pregnancy is most likely to occur). Research has found that only 31% of men and 56% of women know a woman's most fertile time (ISSHR, 2006).

A woman releases an egg (ovulates) every month 12-16 days before the onset of her next menstrual period. This is the most fertile time of her menstrual cycle.



Where women have regular, 28 day cycles, this occurs around the middle of her cycle. As the egg can survive for approximately 12-24 hours and sperm may survive for between 5-7 days, the fertile time can extend from 7-10 days each month.

Many women have irregular cycles, therefore their likely fertile time cannot be reliably identified in each cycle. If a woman has sex without using contraception, she may become pregnant, even at a time in her cycle when she thought she was safe.

STI Screening



Get advice from your doctor, a family planning clinic, an STI clinic, student health service or genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic if you are worried about STIs.

DUBLIN

Dublin Well Woman

Lower Liffey Street.....	01 8728051
Ballsbridge.....	01 6609860
Coolock	01 8484511

IFPA Medical Centres

Cathal Brugha St.....	01 8727088
Tallaght.....	01 4597685/6
GUIDE Clinic , St. James' Hospital....	01 4162315/6

LIMERICK

Family Planning Clinic.....	061 312026
STI Clinic.....	061 482382

CORK

Family Planning Clinic.....	021 4277906
Youth Health Service.....	021 4220490
STI Clinic.....	021 4966844

GALWAY

Family Planning Clinic.....	091 562992
STI Clinic.....	091 525200

WATERFORD

STI Clinic.....	051 842646
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SLIGO

GUM Clinic.....	071 9170473
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Positive Options

If you're facing an unplanned pregnancy, you can freetext the word 'list' to **50444** or visit **positiveoptions.ie** for a list of free, non-judgemental, trustworthy, crisis pregnancy counselling agencies.

Please recycle 

crisispregnancyagency 

**TV off.
Music on.
Candles lit.
Phones silent.
Cat out.
Takeaway in.
Contraception.**

NOBODY ELSE IS GOING TO DO THE THINKING FOR YOU



thinkcontraception.ie