

Patient advice sheet

Contraceptive implant

What is the contraceptive implant?

The implant is a small, flexible, plastic rod, about the size of a matchstick, that sits in your upper arm and releases a hormone called progesterone.

Effectiveness: Over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy

Periods: May be irregular, stop or last longer. May help with heavy, painful periods.

STI protection: No. Use condoms to help protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Hormones: Yes. The implant releases the hormone progesterone

How does it work?

The implant works in three ways:

- It stops your ovaries releasing an egg every month
- It thickens the mucus produced from your cervix. This makes it more difficult for the sperm to get to the egg.
- It thins the lining of the womb, making it less likely that a fertilised egg will implant in the womb.

Can anything make the implant less effective?

Some medicines may make an implant less effective. These include some of the medicines used to treat HIV, epilepsy and tuberculosis (TB), and the complementary medicine St John's Wort. These are called enzyme-inducing drugs. If you take these medicines it will be recommended that you use additional contraception, such as condoms, or that you change to a different method of contraception.

How long can I use the implant for?

Each implant will last for five years and will then need to be replaced. If you have no medical problems, you can continue to use the implant until you reach the menopause when contraception is no longer needed.

Can anyone use an implant?

Most people can have an implant fitted.

An implant may not be suitable for you if you think you might already be pregnant, you don't want your periods to change or you take certain medicines; or if you have now, or had in the past arterial disease or history of serious heart disease or stroke, disease of the liver, breast cancer or unexplained vaginal bleeding (for example, bleeding between periods or after sex).

What are the advantages of an implant?

- It works for five years.
- You can use it if you're breastfeeding.
- Your fertility will return to normal as soon as the implant is taken out.
- It may reduce heavy, painful periods

What are the disadvantages of an implant?

- Your periods may change in a way that isn't acceptable to you
- You may get temporary side effects when you first start using the implant. These should stop within a few months. They may include headaches, breast tenderness and mood changes.
- You may get acne or your acne may get worse.
- It requires a small procedure to fit and remove it.
- It doesn't protect you against sexually transmitted infections, so you may need to use condoms as well.

When can I start using an implant?

You can have an implant fitted at any time in your menstrual cycle if it's certain that you're not pregnant. If the implant is put in during the first five days of your period you'll be protected from pregnancy immediately. If the implant is put in on any other day you won't be protected from pregnancy for the first seven days after it's been fitted. You'll need to avoid sex or use additional contraception, such as condoms, during this time.

If you are currently taking a combined pill or progestogen only pill, or using condoms, continue to take the pill, or to use condoms, consistently and correctly until one week after the implant is fitted. If you have recently had unprotected sex, please ring 0300 303 2880 to discuss emergency contraception.

How will an implant affect my periods?

It is common to have unscheduled bleeding in the first 3 months after having the implant fitted. Your periods will probably change.

- Most implant users will have irregular periods.
- In some implant users, periods will stop completely.
- Some implant users will have periods that last longer.

Your bleeding pattern may change at any time. This usually improves with time but may take 6 – 9 months to settle. These changes may be a nuisance but they're not harmful. If you do have prolonged bleeding, we may be able to give you some additional hormones or medicine that can help control the bleeding.

How is the implant fitted and removed?

The implant is fitted under a local anaesthetic, so you should not feel any pain. However you may feel pushing and pulling as the implant is inserted. We may need to do a urine pregnancy test before your implant is inserted.

Your arm may be a little bruised and swollen for a couple of days but after that you can carry on all of your activities as normal. There is no need for a routine follow-up appointment. Once the implant is fitted you may need to use additional contraception for 7 days afterwards, depending on where you are in your cycle. The implant can be removed at any time which is easily done by numbing the arm with a local anaesthetic and making a tiny cut in your skin to gently pull the implant out. If you have any concerns, please contact the clinic.

Implant exchanges or removals

Please ensure both ends of the implant can be easily felt. **If your implant cannot be felt, please ring 0300 303 2880 to discuss further as you may need to be seen in a specialist clinic.**

If you are having your implant removed, your fertility will return to normal as soon as the implant is removed and you could get pregnant without ongoing contraception. If you do not want to become pregnant, you should use another method of contraception from the day your implant is removed. For further information on contraception: <https://www.nhs.uk/contraception/>

If you want to try for a baby, start pre-pregnancy care such as taking folic acid and stopping smoking. If you have any further questions please call **0300 303 2880** to discuss further. Further information on implants: <https://www.nhs.uk/contraception/methods-of-contraception/contraceptive-implant/>

Please visit www.sexualhealthbucks.nhs.uk or phone 0300 303 2880 for clinic opening times.

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, **in large print** or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net