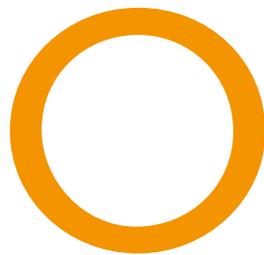


**THIS INFORMATION
IS NOT MEANT TO
REPLACE A VISIT
TO YOUR DOCTOR
TO DISCUSS THE
CONTRACEPTION
THAT'S RIGHT
FOR YOU.**



Which **contraception** is **RIGHT** for **YOU?**



K, ladies, we're going to repeat something you've no doubt heard before: If you're ready to have sex, you're also ready to take responsibility for your actions. Responsibility #1 – ALWAYS wear a condom; it's the only thing that'll help protect you from contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Responsibility #2 – Look into other contraceptive methods to use in addition to a condom, because while protecting yourself and your partner from STIs, you'll also want to ensure that you don't fall pregnant. Condoms are an effective method of birth control, but here at *Girlfriend*, we think having two forms of contraception is the way to go. Plus, contraceptives aren't just for those who are sexually active – the right one can also help with skin conditions, such as acne, and can even relieve killer period cramps. Before you make any decisions, it's always best to speak to a parent or trusted adult, and visit your doctor to find out which method is right for you. Here, we teamed up with Dr Philip Goldstone, medical director at Dr Marie, to give you a rundown of the different types available to you.

INSTRUCTIONS...

Highlight EVERY statement that applies to you. Once you've finished, add up how many of each letter you received. Then, read up on the contraception that could be right for you (based on this test), and take all the info with you to your doctor, so together you can work out the right birth control for you.

* I'm so bad with time that when a party starts at 7pm on Saturday, I rock up at 8.30pm... on Sunday. (E)

* I'm sorry – what was the question again? I think it was something about memory... (A)

* Yeeeeehhhh... deadlines aren't really my forte. (D)

* "Schedule" is my middle name! (C)

* Did someone say there's a contraception that can last YEARS?! Hells yeah! (F)

* I want nothing less than the most effective contraceptive on the market. (E)

* If I have to pay a lot of money, I will,

but if there's a cheaper contraceptive I'll definitely opt for that. (B)

* Money isn't an issue when it comes to my contraception. (A)

* I want bang for my buck! (D)

* I'm not a big fan of getting my periods.

Heck – I wouldn't mind if I didn't see them EVERY month! (A)

* I usually get really heavy periods. (A)

* My periods can be pretty painful. Yeah – they suck! (E)

* I want to have my period at the same time every month. I hate uncertainty! (B)

* I'm kind of fond of having my period. It makes me think of new life. (C)

* I want to be able to skip my period. (B)

* I'd prefer it if my menstrual cycle stays the way it is, thanks. (F)

* I'm not too bothered about weight-gain side-effects if that's the price I have to pay for contraception. (D)

* I've tried the Pill and had a few problems with it. (C)

* Surgery's OK... as long as it's nothing HUGE! (E)

* I'm quite private, so I'd prefer nobody knew I was using extra contraception (in addition to condoms, of course). (D)

* I'm concerned about ovarian cancer and cancer of the uterus. (B)

* I've never been sexually active – I want to make sure all my bases are covered before I go down that road. (F)

* I don't mind knowing something is in my body, as long as I can't see it. (E)

* My body doesn't react that well to oestrogen. (C)

* I've been told my bones are WAAAY stronger than other girls my age. (D)

* A little bit of bleeding doesn't freak me out. Neither do irregular functions while my body adjusts to my contraception. (F)

* I want to live my life without restrictions, and I don't want any contraception standing in the way of that. (D)

MOSTLY As

Check out the vaginal ring.

MOSTLY Bs Look into the combined pill.

MOSTLY Cs Have a go at the mini pill.

MOSTLY Ds Talk to your doc about the contraceptive injection.

MOSTLY Es Find out more about the contraceptive implant.

MOSTLY Fs Take a look at the intrauterine device.



CONTRACEPTIVE IMPLANT

What is it? The contraceptive implant is a small plastic rod – about the size of a match – that contains progestogen. It's inserted by a doctor under the skin in the arm – with the aid of a local anaesthetic... phew!

How does it work? The implant slowly releases progestogen over a period of time, preventing pregnancy by changing the cervical mucus and preventing the ovary from releasing the egg.

Pros Having a success rate of more than 99.9 per cent, it's the most effective contraceptive method available. The advantages of the implant are pretty straightforward, says Dr Philip. "Implants are a good method for girls who may not be good at remembering to take a pill every day, and want an effective, long-term, reversible contraceptive, as each implant lasts for three years." Plus, it can help reduce the severity of painful periods.

Cons Implants can be safely used by most women, but some medications – such as those taken to treat epilepsy – may interfere with its effectiveness. The rod can be felt, but can't be seen.

MINI PILL

What is it? The mini pill is a small tablet that contains only one hormone – progestogen.

How does it work? Similar to the combined pill, when taken successfully (that is, at the same time every day), the mini pill prevents pregnancy by changing the cervical mucus and the lining of the uterus so that the sperm and egg don't meet.

Pros The mini pill is a great option for girls who aren't able to take oestrogen due to medical conditions or side-effects, or for those who have had problems with the combined pill.

Cons "The mini pill needs to be taken at the same time every day for it to be effective," says Dr Philip, so "Schedule" better be your middle name in order for you and the mini pill to get along. Another downside to the mini pill is that it can cause irregular periods – and you can't skip them with these little beauties.

**REMEMBER
TO ALWAYS WEAR
A CONDOM WHEN
ENGAGING IN SEXUAL
ACTIVITY TO PROTECT
YOU AND YOUR PARTNER
FROM SEXUALLY
TRANSMITTED DISEASES
(THEY REALLY DO
EXIST, LADIES).**

INTRAUTERINE DEVICE

What is it? There are two types of intrauterine devices (IUDs) – hormonal and non-hormonal (copper).

How does it work? Once the doctor has placed the IUD inside the uterus, it stops sperm from swimming up to the fallopian tubes, slows the movement of the egg through the fallopian tubes so it dies before it reaching the point of fertilisation, and changes the lining of the uterus so the egg won't stick to it.

Pros Both types of IUDs are good for women who want an effective, convenient, long-term contraceptive – they can last anywhere from five to 10 years! "As long as the IUD has been fitted correctly by a doctor, there is little that can affect its reliability," says Dr Philip. However, it is possible for IUDs to come loose, so you'll need to check on a regular basis that you can still feel the string.

Cons While the hormonal IUD makes your periods lighter, the copper IUD makes them heavier, and there's a chance of some bleeding and irregularity while your body adjusts to either one.

COMBINED PILL

What is it? Commonly known as "the Pill", these tiny tablets contain two hormones – oestrogen and progestogen – and, to be effective in preventing pregnancy, it needs to be taken at roughly the same time every day.

How does it work? When taken correctly, the Pill will prevent the ovary from releasing the egg, and change the cervical mucus and the lining of the uterus to prevent the sperm from meeting with the egg.

Pros There are many different types available, so you're bound to find the right one for you. The Pill is a great option for fixing a lot of period-related issues – such as making them less heavy and painful, achieving consistency so your period comes on the same day every month, and providing the ability to skip your period.

Cons We couldn't have put this next bit better than Dr Philip: "The most important thing about being on the Pill is remembering to take it every day, because even missing one Pill may mean you could be at risk of an unplanned pregnancy." In addition, you may not be a suitable candidate for the Pill if you suffer from high blood pressure, diabetes, migraines or deep-vein thrombosis, but your doctor will be able to give you more deets on that.

CONTRACEPTIVE INJECTION

What is it? This is pretty self-explanatory – it's a contraceptive that comes in the form of an injection. Containing a progestogen hormone, it's considered to be one of the most highly effective forms of contraception.

How does it work? It gives 12 to 14 weeks of contraceptive cover, but you need to remember to return to your doctor for your next dosage. "Being late means there's a chance of contraceptive failure," says Dr Philip.

Pros It's basically an invisible form of contraception, so nobody will know you're using a contraceptive – in addition to a condom, of course – unless you tell them.

Cons "Long-term use may reduce the mineral content of some women's bones, so because bones are still developing up to the age of 18, this may not be the best choice of contraception for girls under 18," advises Dr Philip.

VAGINAL RING

What is it? Non-scientifically speaking, the vaginal ring is a squishy plastic circle that is self-inserted into the vagina.

How does it work? It releases hormones into the blood vessels that are found in the vaginal wall three weeks every month. In order for this to happen successfully, the ring will need to stay in for three weeks, then you remove it for a week to get your period, then insert a new one and start the process again. Three weeks in, one week out... you get it!

Pros You don't have to remember to take a pill EVERY. DAY.

Cons Dr Philip warns, "If you're more than 24 hours late inserting the new ring, there's a chance you won't be protected against pregnancy".



REASON #284

Rushing from school to sport? Feel