

What is an intrauterine device (IUD) or copper coil?

An IUD (intrauterine device), also called a copper coil, is a small plastic T-shape that a doctor or nurse puts into your womb (uterus).

It does not use hormones. It stops pregnancy by releasing copper into the womb.

An IUD is over 99% effective.

It works as soon as it's put in and lasts for 5 or 10 years, depending on the type.

An IUD can also be used as a form of emergency contraception

It is safe to use while breastfeeding.

After an IUD is removed your fertility will return to previous levels straight away.

Getting an IUD (intrauterine device) or copper coil fitted or removed

Having an IUD fitted should take about 5 to 10 minutes but allow at least 30 minutes for the appointment.

A test for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) may be requested prior to the appointment

You must be 100% sure you are not pregnant, (an IUD cannot be fitted if you are pregnant)

Some people find having an IUD fitted painful. You may want to take some painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen an hour before, if you're concerned about pain during the fitting.

The procedure

During the procedure:

A nurse or doctor will gently put a smooth, tube-shaped tool (a speculum) into your vagina so they can open it, like a cervical screening (a smear test)

They will insert the IUD into your womb through your cervix

Tell the person fitting your IUD if you feel any pain or discomfort. You can ask them to stop at any time. You can have a friend, family member or other member of staff in the room with you during the fitting if you want.

After an (IUD) is fitted

You might have some period-like pain for a few days after having an IUD fitted. Painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can help with any pain. You may also have some light bleeding (spotting).

Checking an (IUD) is still in place

An IUD has 2 thin, soft threads that hang down a little way from your womb into the top of your vagina.

The doctor or nurse who fits your IUD will teach you how to feel these threads to check it's still in place.

Check your IUD is in place a few times in the first month and then regularly, such as after each period.

Side effects of an (IUD) (intrauterine device) or copper coil

You might have some period-like pain for a few days.

You may have some bleeding between your periods.

Your periods may become heavier, longer or more painful – this may improve after a few months.

You have a small chance of getting thrush that keeps coming back – talk to your GP if this happens.

Your partner should not be able to feel your IUD threads during sex. If they can and it's a problem, see your GP to get the threads checked.

How well an (IUD) works

An IUD is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

This means that less than 1 in 100 women using an IUD as their method of contraception get pregnant each year.

Risks of an (IUD)

An IUD is very safe, but there are some rare risks, including:

Pelvic infections, usually within 3 weeks of having an IUD fitted

The IUD moving or coming out, usually within 3 months after it's fitted

Ectopic pregnancy in the rare case that your IUD fails

The IUD does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections, so you may have to use condoms as well.

If you get an infection when an IUD is in place this could lead to a pelvic infection if it is not treated.

How will I know that the IUD is still in place

An IUD has one or two threads attached to the end that hang a little way down from your uterus into the top of your vagina. The nurse will teach you how to feel the threads to make sure the IUD is still in place.

You should do this a few times in the first month and then after each period or at regular intervals.

It is very unlikely that an IUD will come out, but if you cannot feel the threads, or if you think you cannot feel the IUD itself, you may not be protected against pregnancy and you should make an appointment to see your GP straight away and use an extra contraceptive method, such as condoms. If you had sex recently you might need to use emergency

Having an (IUD) removed

An IUD is effective for 5 to 10 years, depending on the type. Talk to your doctor to find out when your IUD is due to be removed or replaced.

It is possible to get pregnant as soon as your IUD has been taken out.

If you do not want to get pregnant, use another type of contraception, such as condoms, starting 7 days before you have it removed.



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