

What is the contraceptive implant?

The contraceptive implant is a small plastic rod, around 4 cm long, that a doctor or nurse puts under the skin of your arm.

It prevents pregnancy by releasing the hormone progesterone. This stops the ovaries releasing an egg each month

An implant is over 99% effective if it's replaced every 3 years. If not it's less effective.

A specially trained nurse will remove the implant at any time if you no longer want to use it.

Once the implant is removed your chance of getting pregnant will return to what it was before the implant was fitted straight away.

How the contraceptive implant is fitted?

A nurse will fit the contraceptive implant under the skin of your arm. It takes a few minutes.

The nurse will use a local anaesthetic injection or spray so you will not feel pain and then make a small cut in the skin of your upper arm.

Put the implant under your skin – it's about the size of a matchstick and will not be visible once fitted

Seal the cut with a dressing, which you can remove once the cut has healed.

If there's a chance you may be pregnant, the nurse will not insert the implant.

How well does the contraceptive implant work?

The contraceptive implant is over 99% effective. Less than 1 in 100 women who use it for a year will get pregnant.

The implant will protect against pregnancy immediately if it's fitted during the first 5 days of your menstrual cycle. The first day of your period is day 1 of your menstrual cycle.

If the implant is fitted after day 5 of your menstrual cycle, you will not be protected against pregnancy immediately. You'll need to use another form of contraception such as condoms until you've had the implant in for 7 days.

How the contraceptive implant is removed

Occasionally, an implant is difficult to feel under the skin, in which case you may be referred to a specialist centre to have it removed with the help of an ultrasound scan

Keep the dressing dry to allow the incision site to heal. Remove the dressing carefully in 3 to 5 days.

It is common to have bruising. This should fade over the next week or so.

Your arm may ache after the local anaesthetic has worn off, Take your usual painkillers.

There will be a small scar at the site of insertion or removal.

It is better to start your chosen contraception before your implant is removed.

Steri-strips (paper sutures) should be left in place until wound edges are adherent (joined together) – this should take about 3 to 5 days. You can use cling film to keep the dressing dry (for example, when showering).

If you do not have a further implant fitted, or if you are not using any alternative contraception, your fertility will return immediately.

Important

It's possible to get pregnant after a contraceptive implant is removed.

If you do not want to get pregnant, use another method of contraception, such as condoms, as soon as your implant is removed.

Local anaesthetic is used to remove the implant and a very small cut is used, leaving only a tiny scar.

I am aware of possible complications including bruising and infection. I understand that steri strips are applied with a dressing and I need to keep it dry for 5 days.

Very rarely it may not be possible to remove the implant. In this case, the implant may need to be removed in a different clinic, by an experienced doctor using ultrasound guidance.

I understand that fertility returns immediately following removal of an implant and alternative contraceptive methods are required.

Side-effects of the contraceptive implant

Most side-effects caused by the contraceptive implant occur when you first start using the implant. They are not usually severe. The most common side-effects are:

Changes in your periods (see below).

Fluid retention and breast tenderness.

Acne: your skin may temporarily worsen, although it can also improve.

Itching or bruising after implant insertion.

Mood swings or low mood.

Weight gain.

Breast tenderness.

Risks from using the contraceptive implant?

Apart from bruising and soreness, it is possible, although very unusual, to leave a small scar.

It is important to be able to feel the implant under the skin after insertion.

There is a small risk of insertion error in which the implant is not actually inserted by the procedure.

If you experience severe pain, excessive swelling, inflammation or discharge please report it to your GP. If you cannot contact your GP you should contact A&E.



Head Office
Louth County Hospital
High Holme Rd
Louth
Lincolnshire
LN11 0EU
Louth

PHONE: (01507) 631297

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