

Patient information

Contraception after childbirth

Introduction

It may seem early to start thinking about contraception, but pregnancy can occur soon after birth, and it is possible to fall pregnant before your periods return. Becoming pregnant less than a year after childbirth increases the risks of complications for you and your baby, so it is recommended that a method of contraception is started from three weeks after birth. You do not need to use any contraception before this as it is not possible to become pregnant in this time. Bearing all this in mind it is a good idea to start thinking about contraception sooner rather than later.

Types of contraception available

The different methods of contraception you can use after giving birth depends on whether or not you are planning to breastfeed. The following summarises the different contraception options available after birth and what to do if you are breast feeding.

Type of contraception	When can I start it?		Other information
	Breast feeding	Not breast feeding	
Mirena coil (IUS Intrauterine System)	From 4 weeks after birth. (It can also be put in within 48 hrs of birth.)		Small device releasing the hormone progesterone, it is inserted into the womb and lasts for up to 5 years.
Copper coil (IUD Intrauterine Device)	From 4 weeks after birth. (It can also be put in within 48 hrs of birth.)		Also inserted into the womb, but does not use any hormones. Lasts for up to 10 years, but can make periods heavier and more painful.

Type of contraception	When can I start it?		Other information
Implant	3 weeks after birth		A progestogen releasing device inserted into the upper arm, which lasts for 3 years.
Contraceptive injection	Straight after birth		An injection of progestogen which you get every 3 months. Fertility may take a while to return to normal after stopping.
Oral contraceptive pill (combined pill), contraceptive vaginal ring and contraceptive patch	6 months after birth	3 weeks after birth	A pill containing oestrogen and progestogen. Also good for regulating and reducing periods. Some conditions mean you cannot take this pill; this can be discussed with your GP.
Progestogen only pill (mini pill)	Straight after birth		Daily pill containing progestogen. Some brands must be taken within a tight time interval, which does not suit everyone's lifestyle!
Barrier methods (male and female condoms, cap and diaphragm)	Straight after birth		Provide contraception without using hormones. Condoms also provide protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), so should be used when there is a risk of catching an STI, such as having sex with a new partner.

Will breastfeeding alone prevent pregnancy?

Breastfeeding is also known as lactation. When used as a contraceptive method it is called lactational amenorrhoea (LAM). LAM can be up to 98% effective in preventing pregnancy if you are fully breastfeeding or nearly fully breastfeeding (infrequently giving your baby other fluids), and your baby is less than 6 months old, and you have no periods. After six months, or if you start having periods again, another method of contraception will be needed.

I have completed my family, what are the options for me?

If you are certain that you have completed your family then you may want to

consider sterilization for you or your partner (known as a vasectomy). This means you do not have to worry about using contraception again, but it is permanent and will involve an operation for you or your partner. Female sterilization can be performed from six weeks after birth and is usually done under general anaesthetic. A vasectomy is a relatively simple operation which can be done under local anaesthetic and takes around 15 minutes. You can discuss sterilisation with your GP who will be able to refer you for the procedure.

Where to access contraception

You can get contraception from your GP, the six week baby check is a good opportunity to discuss this. Alternatively, you can visit a specialist family planning clinic, such as Abbey View Clinic, 9-10 The Churchyard, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 1RX.

Finding out more

If you want to know more about starting contraception after birth, or the different methods of contraception, you can talk to your GP, midwife or obstetrician (if you are seeing one). You can also access information about contraception online.

Contacts

Abbey View Clinic – telephone: 0300 123 3650

Links:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/contraception-guide/Pages/contraception.aspx>

<http://www.suffolksexualhealth.com/reproductivehealthclinicsicashsuffolk.co.uk>

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the hospital website www.wsh.nhs.uk and click on the link, or visit the disabledgo website:

<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>

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