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Intrauterine Device (IUD)

Background.

The Intrauterine Device (IUD) is a top tier contraceptive option. IUDs are “long-range reversible contraception,” because they offer continuous contraception until a woman chooses to become pregnant. The some IUDs can be used to effectively control heavy menstrual bleeding, as well.

IUDs are made of a surgical plastic, which is placed in the cavity of the uterus. Each IUD has an adjunctive component to enhance its effectiveness. There are two main types of IUDs: progestin and copper. Together the plastic device and adjunctive component make fertilization and implantation unlikely.

An IUD user has her own hormonal cycle while using an IUD, but menstrual bleeding pattern generally changes. With progestin type IUDs, periods are generally lighter and shorter, or there may be no bleeding at all. Copper IUDs generally cause slightly more cramping and a heavier bleeding than normal periods. IUDs last 3, 5 or 10 years depending on the product, and can be taken out any time upon request. Women can conceive quickly after IUD removal.

Starting “The IUD”.

An IUD is placed into the uterus using sterile procedure during an office visit. (An office visit is required to remove an IUD, as well.) A consultation and signed consent prior to getting an IUD are required..

You can not have an IUD placed if your are pregnant, or have a sexually transmitted disease or vaginal infection. These issues will need to managed before an IUD is inserted. Most women have an easier time having the IUD placed during the heaviest day of her period.

Following the insertion of an IUD, one week of “pelvic rest” is recommended. This means no tampons or sex for one week. The copper IUD provides immediate contraception and can be used for emergency contraception if placed within 3 days of unprotected intercourse.

Urban Myths about IUDs.

IUDs cause pelvic infections.	IUD placement carries a <i>very low</i> risk of infection. Beyond 3 weeks following placement of IUD, the risk for PID is no different than other contraception. High risk sexual encounters cause pelvic infections.
IUDs cause ectopic pregnancies.	Ectopic pregnancy rate for IUD is the same as a women not using contraception.
IUDs are unsafe.	IUDs are safe medical devices causing adverse side effects less than 1% of the time.

Frequently asked questions?

Q: What should I do if I can't feel my strings?

A: Women are instructed to check their IUD strings periodically. Changes in string length can mean there is a change in the IUD placement. It is not uncommon to be unable to feel your strings. If you suspect there is a change in the IUD placement for any reason, schedule an office appointment.

Q: What if I don't have a period?

A: It is common to stop having periods while on the Mirena IUD. If you do not have a period for 6 weeks, then do a pregnancy test. If this is NEGATIVE, the absent period will likely be your new normal. If a pregnancy test is POSITIVE, you need to schedule an immediate appointment. The IUD must come out; there is a good chance the pregnancy will be terminated. A pregnancy test should be done. Call the doctor's office for advice.

Q: Is there a risk of infertility from using the IUD?

A. No. Risks of infertility are related to ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus) and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Pelvic infections are caused from sexually transmitted diseases. All women with IUDs are cautioned to have safe sexual practices, specifically have new partners wear condoms and get tested for STDs. This advice should apply to all women.

Common Temporary Discomforts.

Women can expect to feel "crampy" the first few hours after having an IUD placed. Ibuprofen is an excellent pain reliever for this type of pain. Sporadic, fleeting cramps may suddenly come and go for a couple months.

IUD side effects can be unpleasant for 3-4 months. More often than not, the body adapts to the IUD presence and symptoms resolve. Generally, women who experience an unpleasant adjustment period eventually LOVE their IUD for the benefits and convenience this form of contraception offers.

SIDE EFFECTS and ADVERSE RISKS.

Common Side Effects

mid-cycle spotting
cramping
heavy periods
change in vaginal discharge

Rare Adverse Risks

ectopic pregnancy
IUD embedments into uterus.
perforation of uterus
pelvic infection

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF YOU EXPERIENCE THESE SYMPTOMS WHILE USING THE IUD.

severe abdominal pain
missed period/positive pregnancy test
Vaginal discharge is foul.
There is a change in your "new normal".

heavy unusual bleeding
Plastic tip of IUD is felt.
exposure to STD
Just because.