

Long-Acting Reversible Contraception and You

Contraceptive choices come in many forms, from condoms to the Pill. But have you heard of long-acting reversible methods?

Long-acting reversible contraceptives (shortened to LARC) are designed to take the daily hassle out of contraception. They're the most effective forms of reversible contraception available – they don't require you to remember taking them every day. LARC methods vary in how they're given and how long they last (from eight weeks to ten years), providing a number of benefits:

- They're up to 99% effective at preventing pregnancy
- They don't interrupt sex
- They may be suitable for women who are advised not to take the hormone oestrogen (which is present in some oral contraceptive pills and other methods of contraception)
- You don't have to remember to take your contraception every day

There are four LARC methods available in the UK:

Very LARC (vLARC) methods

- The copper coil (also called the intrauterine device, or IUD)
- The intrauterine system (also called the IUS)
- The sub-dermal implant

LARC method

- The contraceptive injection

In the first year of use, approximately 9 out of every 100 women on the Pill will experience an unplanned pregnancy, compared with 1 out of every 100 women using vLARCs.

Below is a short introduction to each type of LARC: your doctor or nurse can provide more detailed advice, tailored to your needs.

The copper coil



The copper coil, also known as the IUD (intrauterine device), is placed inside your womb. It's typically made of plastic and copper and it doesn't contain any hormones.

Benefits

- Provides effective contraception for up to five to ten years
- Can be removed by a healthcare professional at any time, enabling your fertility to rapidly return to normal levels
- Could be an option if you don't want, or are unable to take, hormonal contraceptives

Considerations

- It is inserted or 'fitted' within the womb by a trained doctor or nurse during an extended appointment, the fitting process takes approximately five minutes
- Having it fitted may be uncomfortable and can cause cramping
- It may cause heavier periods and painful cramps

The intrauterine system



The intrauterine system, (also called the IUS) made of flexible plastic, is placed inside your womb and continually releases a very low dose of a progestogen hormone.

Benefits

- Provides effective contraception for up to three to five years
- Can be removed by a healthcare professional at any time, enabling your fertility to rapidly return to normal levels
- Delivers a low dose of hormone locally and directly into the womb, acting where it is needed
- Can help make periods lighter and shorter – some types of IUS are approved to treat women suffering from heavy periods

Considerations

- It is inserted or 'fitted' within the womb by a trained doctor or nurse during an extended appointment, the fitting process takes approximately five minutes
- Having it fitted may be uncomfortable and can cause cramping
- For the first three to six months after fitting, your periods may become irregular and the number of days you bleed or experience spotting may increase. After your body adjusts, the number of days you bleed may reduce, and your periods may stop altogether

The sub-dermal implant



Rod-shaped and flexible, the sub-dermal implant is inserted under the skin in the upper arm. It continually releases a progestogen hormone into your bloodstream.

Benefits

- Provides effective contraception for up to three years
- Can be removed by a healthcare professional at any time, enabling your fertility to rapidly return to normal levels

Considerations

- It needs to be inserted by a trained doctor or nurse as a minor surgical procedure and may cause some tenderness
- Periods may stop, be irregular, more frequent or heavier

The contraceptive injection



Contraceptive injections contain progestogen. They're usually administered into the muscle in your buttock or injected under the skin in the upper thigh or abdomen.

Benefits

- Provides effective contraception for eight to thirteen weeks (depending on type used)
- Could be an option if you don't like the idea of having a device inside your body
- Can be given by both doctors and nurses without the need for special training

Considerations

- You can't remove the hormone from your body, so any side effects you get may last for as long as the injected hormone circulates within the body
- May be associated with a loss of bone mineral density if used long term
- Some women may experience heavier bleeding or their periods may stop altogether
- Return to normal levels of fertility can take up to one year

Remember that LARCs do not prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can reduce your risk of getting STIs by using a condom.