

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid 10-25% of women use an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control in Europe, compared to 1% in the United States.

Q. What are the benefits and disadvantages of IUDs?

A. An intrauterine device (IUD) consists of a small, T-shaped flexible plastic frame that is inserted in the uterus by a health care provider. IUDs provide very reliable contraception for as long as they remain in the uterus, or up to 5-10 years.

Although they are not at the top of the list among birth control methods here in the U.S., IUDs have their merits. In the past, IUDs were plagued with side effects for women who used them, including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Since then, a new generation of IUDs have emerged that are safe, effective and among the least expensive long-term methods of contraception available.

While there are two types of IUDs – one releases copper ions and the other the hormone progesterin – both work by 1) immobilizing sperm to prevent fertilization and 2) altering the lining of the uterus to inhibit implantation should fertilization occur. Additionally, hormonal IUDs can block sperm from the uterus by thickening cervical mucus.

As with any form of birth control, IUDs have both pros and cons:

Advantages:

- Over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy
- Cost-effective, long-term contraception
- Can be removed at any time by a clinician
- Fertility quickly returns following removal
- Copper IUDs can be used by women who cannot use hormonal methods

Disadvantages:

- Unlike condoms, IUDs do not protect against STDs
- Require insertion and removal by a clinician
- Side effects in some women

While side effects of IUDs are rare, having an STD can put women at higher risk for complications such as PID and infertility. Because of this, IUDs are best for women who are in a mutually monogamous relationship and at low risk for STDs. For more information, go to www.plannedparenthood.org and search for "IUD".

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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