

For Patients: A Guide to the Contraception Decision Aid and Method Information Sheets

What is a contraception decision aid?

A decision aid visually shares information about contraception options with you* so that you can learn the features of each method, narrow down your options, and make a choice that fits your life.

Decision aids are often used by providers as tools during counseling to engage, teach, and support you. You can also look at a decision aid on your own to learn about and reflect on your options.

This decision aid is two pages and shows all the available contraception options in the United States.

What are method information sheets?

These sheets include more in-depth information than decision aids. Each sheet is two pages of information on one method. They were designed similarly to allow for comparison.

What should I expect during contraceptive counseling?

Your contraception needs may change throughout your life. It is normal to switch methods throughout life as your health, relationships, lifestyle, and pregnancy desires change.

Each provider counsels a little differently. Generally, they will start by getting to know you. They will ask about your health history and your past contraception use. They should ask you what you liked and did not like about your past methods and what you hope your contraception will be like now. Then they should counsel you on your options. This is when they might show you a decision aid to visually guide you in considering your options. The provider should tell you about options that fit your health history and match up with what you told them you wanted. You can ask questions as the provider is talking to make sure you understand, including asking about options the provider has not mentioned. You should never feel pressured to decide before you are ready and feel good about the choice. If your visit runs out of time and you have not decided, you can ask your provider for another visit soon and about what you can do to prevent pregnancy between now and then. If you do choose a method, make sure you understand how to access the method and use it. If after you start using your method you realize you do not like it, it is okay to stop or change methods at any time. It is okay not to use any method. Even if you love your method at first, it is normal to want to try something else as your life changes. Most importantly, you should always feel respected and heard by your provider. If not, you should find a new provider or clinic.

Reflect on: What is important to you about your contraception?

To help you select the method that is best for you right now, consider what you want and need from it. There are many attributes of the method that may matter to you. For example:

how easy it is to start and stop	how easy it is to use	how often you have to use it	where on your body it goes	is it safe to use postpartum
how it affects your period or cramps	how it affects acne	how it affects your weight	how well it prevents pregnancy	if your partner is involved in using it
does it treat symptoms of endometriosis	does it affect your risk of vaginal infections	privacy from partner, parent, roommate, etc.	how quickly you can get pregnant once stopped	how to store the method or supplies
does it contain hormones	does it prevent STIs	how much it costs	does it affect sexual pleasure	<i>many more...</i>

The materials are free online. Scan the QR code for a website with a PDF of the decision aid, method information sheets, and a postpartum contraception decision aid.



* “You” refers to people who have vaginas and “partner” refers to people with penises.

How to understand this decision aid

- You can write on it if that helps you visually narrow down options.
- You can share it with your partner or a trusted friend or family member to discuss your options.
- **Understand the information on the front of the decision aid**
 - You will see images of all methods available in the United States. This includes methods for your partner and emergency contraception pills.
 - You will see the methods organized in rows and boxes by how you can start and stop the methods. You will see sterilization is in a category of its own because it is permanent.
 - The method images and names are color-coded by the hormones in the method. Blue methods have progestin, green methods have progestin and estrogen, and purple methods have no hormones. Hormones sometimes matter to patients and some patients cannot use certain hormones for health reasons. The methods with hormones are on the left side of the decision aid and the methods with no hormones are on the right.
 - The double arrow circle contains information on how often you must take an action to use the method. This can help you consider if the method will fit into your daily life or sexual encounters.
 - In the middle of each method box is a fact about the method that might be important to you.
 - At the bottom of each method box is how it affects your period. This may be important to you if you want to change your period or to understand what to expect when using the method.
- **Understand the information on the back of the decision aid**
 - The left column is a drawing of a body showing where each method is used. This may be important if you are concerned about privacy or about a method being inside you. The picture can teach you about where your reproductive parts are on your body and how big they are.
 - In the bottom of the left column is information to answer common patient questions.
 - The center column shows the likelihood of getting pregnant with each method, or how well it works. The people figure shows how many people out of 10 would likely get pregnant in a year of using the methods. In the first row is the likelihood of getting pregnant if you use no method. Then the methods are listed from most to least likely that you will get pregnant while using it. You can sometimes use two methods together to increase pregnancy prevention.
 - It can be confusing why methods do not always work to prevent pregnancy. The right column has a description for each method of when you might get pregnant while using it. If you experience the described event, you can use emergency contraception within 5 days of sex to prevent pregnancy. Knowing when methods do not work can help you consider how likely it is for you to experience that in your life and decide if the method is a good fit for you.

How to understand these method information sheets

- The sheets may be most helpful to review either once you have narrowed down your options to a few methods to compare or once you have selected a method and want to learn more about it.
- The sheets contain similar information to help compare. Information is organized into boxes with headings. At the top is the method name and other common names. Then, reading top to bottom, you can learn how the method works to prevent pregnancy, how to use it, privacy and control of it, if it works immediately once started, health conditions it might not work well with, when to use emergency contraception, how well it prevents pregnancy, common side effects, safety of using it postpartum, signs to look out for and contact your provider if you experience, and questions you might want to ask your provider during counseling about the method.