

## **Choosing the IUD - The Intrauterine Device**

The intrauterine device (IUD) is a small, plastic device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy. The IUD offers safe, effective and reversible protection against pregnancy. Weighing the risks of using an IUD against the benefits it provides, will help you decide whether this method of birth control is right for you. The IUD must be replaced every 3, 5 or 10 years depending on the type.

### **Are there different types, and how do the IUDs work?**

Currently there are two IUD types available in Canada:

1. The hormone type (Mirena Kyleena and Jaydess)
2. The copper type (Nova-T, Flexi T, Liberte, Mona Lisa and SMB).

They work in different ways. The hormonal IUDs releases a small amount of the hormone progesterone into the uterus. The lining of the uterus becomes thinner and the cervical mucus becomes thicker. Both changes make it harder for the sperm to enter the uterus.

The copper IUD releases a small amount of copper into the uterus. Copper changes the chemistry of the lining of the uterus, induces a low-grade inflammation (no infection) and destroys sperm before they reach the tubes and the eggs.

### **Advantages common to both IUD's**

The IUD has many advantages over other birth control methods:

- It is by far the most effective reversible method of contraception:
  - The copper IUDs may fail to prevent a pregnancy in 1-1.5% of users
  - The hormone IUDs may fail in 0.1-0.7% of users
- Easy to use - you don't have to remember it before sex or to take a pill every day.
- Does not interfere with sexual intercourse or daily activities. Vigorous physical activity, such as jogging or dancing, will not dislodge it. Once it's in place, you should not feel it and neither should your partner.
- The IUD's do not decrease fertility. Once removed, you should be able to get pregnant like anybody else.
- Infection risks are minimal, and usually happens in the first 21 days (related to the insertion)
- Monthly costs are much less than other types of birth control.

### **Disadvantages common to both IUDs**

Serious complications from use of an IUD are very rare. However, some women do have problems. These problems usually happen during, or soon after the insertion:

- **Expulsion:** The IUD can be expelled out (or pushed out) of the uterus into the vagina. If this happens, it is no longer effective. The chance is 3%-6%.
- **Perforation:** The IUD can perforate (or pierce) the wall of the uterus during insertion. This is very rare and occurs in only about 1 out of every 1,000 insertions. It is more common in women who had C/Sections and or are breastfeeding at the time of insertion.
- **Infections:** Infections of the uterus or fallopian tubes can occur in less than 1%. It is more common in the first 21 days. If treated early and appropriately, the IUD does not need removal.

- Pregnancy: Rarely, pregnancy may occur while a woman is using an IUD. If the IUD is still in place, there can be risks to the mother and fetus, like miscarriage, infection or ectopic pregnancy. The IUD should be removed as soon as possible.
- The strings can occasionally predispose to vaginal infections with bacterial vaginosis
- The strings can occasionally cause discomfort in the male partner
- In some women, the IUD becomes skewed and malpositioned, and cause pain
- You have to pay for it upfront.

### **Advantages of the hormone IUDs**

- The amount of bleeding decreases, and some women don't have periods at all. There is no danger if the periods are completely gone.
- Protects against endometriosis and iron deficiency anemia due to heavy periods.
- Protects against uterine cancer

### **Disadvantages of the hormone IUDs**

- Hormone IUD users may experience side effects associated with progesterone, such as mood swings, breast tenderness, weight gain, hair loss, libido change, worsening acne and bloating.
- Spotting is common in the first few weeks to months, but it usually gets progressively better.
- Ovarian cysts are more common (5-22%), and they may cause pelvic pain. They resolve spontaneously in almost all cases.

### **Advantages of the copper IUDs**

- They contain no hormones, so the cycles are natural
- They are very cheap, about \$60 for 5 years

### **Disadvantages of the copper IUDs**

- Periods tend to change, with increased bleeding and cramping by 25-50%. Effective treatments are available - if required.

**NOTE:** Although the IUD offers effective protection against pregnancy, it does not protect against STDs. If you and your partner are not in a mutually monogamous relationship, use a condom every time you have sex.

### **Is the IUD the right birth control method for me?**

In most women, the advantages of the IUD far outweigh the potential side effects. However, certain conditions can increase the chance of having problems with the IUD. The IUD may not be a good choice in women who have:

- Multiple sexual partners or a high risk for sexually transmitted diseases (for either IUD)
- A uterus with a cavity that is abnormally shaped or scarred (for either IUD)
- Very painful or abnormally heavy periods (for copper IUDs)
- Copper allergy (for copper IUDs)
- Moderate to severe acne or depression (for hormone IUD)

And there are some women who simply will do better with other methods. For example, a woman with acne and heavy periods may be better off taking the birth control pills.

## **Choosing the IUD type**

If you chose the IUD, then the next step is to select the type. This can be a very difficult decision for some women and their physicians.

### **The hormone IUD may be a good choice for you if:**

- You want the most reliable method of reversible birth control (lowest failure)
- Your periods are on the heavy side, or you want to avoid or skip your periods
- You have had failure with other methods in the past (cannot remember to take the pill)
- You have completed your family but do not want a tubal ligation

### **The copper IUD may be a good choice for you if:**

- Your menstrual cycles are light or normal
- You have problems with hormonal methods of contraception, or want to avoid hormones
- You are looking for a long-term, reliable method of contraception
- You have had failure with other methods in the past (cannot remember to take the pill)
- You have completed your family but do not want a tubal ligation

## **What are my options for a copper IUD**

If you chose copper, be aware that there are 19 different copper IUDs in Canada. Choosing the most appropriate depends on whether you have had children or not (“standard size” for the former, “mini or short size” for the later. Some last for 5 years, others 10 years.

## **What are my options for a Hormonal IUD?**

If you chose hormone, and have no children, there are 3 choices. If you have children, only the Mirena is recommended. There are now 3 hormonal IUDs: Mirena, Kyleena and Jaydess.

- The Mirena is large size with the highest hormone. It is appropriate for most women (with or without previous children). It costs around \$400, last for 5 years, and it is the most likely to lead to no periods at all.
- The Kyleena is medium size with lower hormone. It is indicated for women who have no children. It costs the same, and also lasts for 5 years. Periods may or may not disappear.
- The Jaydess is the smaller version with the least hormone, suitable for women who have no children. It costs around \$280, last for 3 years, and is not likely to stop the periods at all.

The hormonal side effect profile is very similar, despite the different doses of hormones in them.

The larger it is, the least likely to fail, but the more likely to lead to no periods, and to cause some pain or cramping (The Mirena may be too large for some women who have no children).

There are other handouts available for further education:

- [Choosing an IUD - in a nutshell](#)
- [The day of the IUD insertion](#)
- [After the IUD insertion](#)
- [Living with an IUD](#)
- [Removing the IUD](#)

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