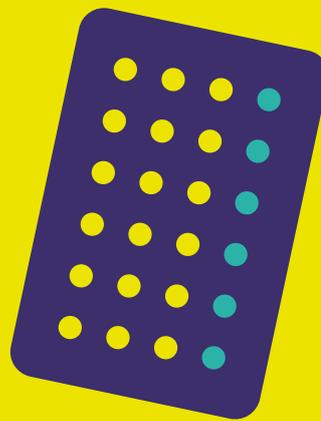




CONTRACEPTION

everything you need to know



This booklet is designed to help you learn about the main methods of preventing pregnancy (contraceptive methods). By reading it you will learn what they are, how effective they are, how they work, and how you can use them.



If you don't want to get pregnant and plan to use a contraceptive method, you can contact the family counseling center in your area. **The counseling center is a free sexual and reproductive** health service, accessible to all women, including foreign women without residence permits.



Here you will find a list of all family counseling centers in Italy, divided by region and province

In some regions, contraceptive methods are free; the counseling center staff will provide you with all the necessary information.

There are many methods to avoid pregnancy that have different levels of effectiveness. To choose the best method for you, it is important to know their effectiveness, safety and mechanism of action. However, **the most effective method is not necessarily the best one for your needs.** The counseling team, which often also has linguistic-cultural mediators, will help you choose the method that is best for you, taking into account your physical characteristics, habits, culture of origin and lifestyle. If you wish, you can involve your husband or partner in the discussion and choice, but remember that their permission is not necessary: the decision is yours alone. **No one can force you to use or not use a contraceptive.** If you are experiencing pressure or coercion regarding your reproductive choices, you can talk to the counseling staff, who will offer support and, if necessary, help in dealing with any difficult situations.

Contraceptive methods

The World Health Organization classifies contraceptive methods according to their effectiveness in preventing pregnancy.

Very effective methods (failure less than 1% of cases):

- 1. Subcutaneous implant (Nexplanon®).** This is a 4-cm-long plastic stick that the doctor inserts with a needle under the skin in the upper arm. No anesthesia is needed, and insertion causes a sensation similar to a puncture. The stick releases a hormone that prevents ovulation and thus pregnancy. It can cause very irregular bleeding, or complete absence of menstruation. Removal is done through a small skin incision with local anesthesia. It lasts for 3 years, but can be removed at any time if pregnancy is desired.
- 2. Copper or progestin hormone-releasing intrauterine coil (IUD).** It is a device that is inserted into the uterus by the gynecologist. It can be used by all women, including those who have not yet had children. There are IUDs that release copper and those that release a progestin hormone. The copper released by the IUD damages the sperm, and changes the mucous membrane lining the inner wall of the uterus, making it unsuitable to receive the fertilized egg. Generally, copper IUDs make menstruation more abundant and longer. The IUD that releases the hormone progestin, on the other hand, thickens the mucus in the cervical canal and prevents the passage of sperm from the vagina to the uterus. It also thins the mucosa lining the uterine cavity, making it difficult for the fertilized egg to implant. This type of IUD can reduce menstrual flow until it disappears altogether. Both IUDs last for at least 5 years, but if you desire pregnancy they can be removed at any time.
- 3. Female and male sterilization.** This is an irreversible surgical procedure that is performed by a physician. Female sterilization requires surgery under anesthesia to ligate both tubes—two small organs that connect the ovary and the uterus—thus preventing the egg and sperm from meeting and subsequent pregnancy. Male sterilization is an outpatient procedure that involves closing the channels that allow sperm to pass through, thus preventing pregnancy. In Italy, access to these procedures can be difficult in many regions because of their irreversibility.

Effective methods (failure in 1-9% of cases):

- 1. Estroprogestin pill.** This pill contains two hormones, an estrogen and a progestin, which block ovulation and thus prevent pregnancy. Not all women can take it: you must consult a doctor who will assess your health condition for a prescription. It must be taken every day, at the same time; if you forget it, its effectiveness diminishes and you run the risk of getting pregnant.
- 2. Estroprogestin vaginal ring.** This is a flexible plastic ring that you have to insert and replace in the vagina every month. It releases two hormones, an estrogen and a progestin, which prevent ovulation and therefore pregnancy. Not all women can use it: to prescribe it you need to talk to a doctor who will assess your health condition. You must remember to remove and replace the ring every month; if you forget to do so, the effectiveness decreases and you run the risk of getting pregnant.
- 3. Estroprogestin patch.** This is a patch that is applied to the skin of the belly, arms, or buttocks. The hormones in the patch prevent ovulation and therefore pregnancy. Not all women can use it: to prescribe it you need to talk to a doctor who will assess your health condition. You need to replace it once a week; if you forget, the effectiveness decreases and you run the risk of getting pregnant.
- 4. Progestin-only pill.** This pill contains only one progestin hormone, which prevents ovulation and thus pregnancy. It has fewer contraindications than the estroprogestin pill, but can cause very irregular bleeding or absence of menstruation. It must be taken every day, at the same time; if you forget it, its effectiveness diminishes and you run the risk of getting pregnant.
- 5. Extended-release progestin injections.** The injection is given every 3 months by the doctor in the arm or buttocks. Progestin is a hormone that prevents ovulation and thus pregnancy. In Italy, this drug is not licensed for contraception, and therefore the method is not generally offered. If your doctor decides to give the injection, you will need to sign a consent to the unauthorized use of the drug.

Moderately effective methods (failure in 10-19% of cases):

- 1. Male condom.** It is made of latex or alternative materials for those allergic to latex (polyurethane); it should be placed on the erect penis to prevent sperm from entering the vagina during intercourse. It must be worn before intercourse begins. Effectiveness depends on proper use and how it is stored. It also protects against sexually transmitted diseases so it is especially recommended for risky intercourse, even in addition to another method of contraception.
- 2. Female condom.** It is made of latex or alternative materials for those allergic to latex (polyurethane); it should be inserted into the vagina to prevent the passage of sperm. It must be inserted before intercourse begins, and effectiveness depends on proper use. It also protects against sexually transmitted diseases and, like the male condom, is recommended for risky intercourse, even in addition to another method of contraception. It is difficult to find in Italy, but can be purchased online.

Ineffective methods (failure in more than 20% of cases):

- 1. Coitus interruptus.** Consists of withdrawing the penis from the vagina before ejaculation. The method is unreliable because small amounts of sperm can be released before ejaculation, increasing the risk of pregnancy.
- 2. Periodic abstinence-based methods.** They are based on detecting fertile days by different methods, such as calculating risk days, checking basal temperature trends, or cervical mucus density. On fertile days you should avoid sexual intercourse or use a condom to reduce the risk of pregnancy.

There are also **emergency contraceptives**. If you have had unprotected intercourse, used contraception incorrectly, or the method of contraception you were using did not work (e.g., if the condom broke), you have two options: **you can go to the counseling center and ask for a copper IUD to be inserted within five days of risky intercourse, or you can use emergency contraception pills** that delay ovulation and prevent pregnancy. They do not cause an abortion and are not effective if you are already pregnant. The levonorgestrel pill is effective up to 72 hours after unprotected intercourse; the ulipristal acetate pill is effective up to 120 hours after unprotected intercourse. Efficacy gradually decreases with time, so it is best to use them as soon as possible after risky intercourse. **Emergency contraception pills are available at pharmacies without a prescription**, even if you are a minor.

Here you can find more information, in different languages, about IVG, health services and your rights



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