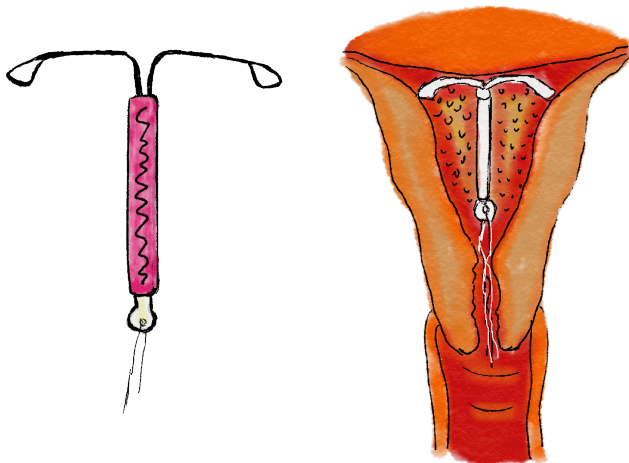


Intrauterine Device (IUD)

What is it and what is it for?

It is a small, T-shaped plastic device. It is inserted folded up into the uterus and, once inside, it opens out and fits into the walls of the uterus. It prevents you from getting pregnant. How it works depends on the type of IUD.



What is it not for?

It does not protect you from catching sexually transmitted diseases and it is not a method of abortion or of interrupting pregnancy. Nor does it stop you from getting pregnant if it is inserted after having unprotected sex.

What types are there and what side effects do they have?

The copper IUD has a copper wire coiled inside the stem. It releases copper. Copper produces irritation and modifies the optimal environment in which sperm and the egg would meet. In general, it is well tolerated by the body. You might experience irregular vaginal bleeding and periods, anemia caused by the bleeding and, occasionally, discomfort.

The hormonal IUD releases the hormone progestin, which prevents pregnancy by interrupting the menstrual cycle. It usually makes you stop menstruating or your periods become lighter. This type of IUD can cause liquid retention, weight gain, headaches, mood swings or irritability and stomach upsets.

Although it is unusual, it may make your blood thicker and encourage the appearance of blood clots in the veins (thrombosis), as is the case with all hormonal methods of contraception. This is more common in women who are smokers or whose legs have been immobilized due to long-distance journeys, wearing bandages or plaster, etc.

The hormonal IUD is not recommended for women with untreated sexually transmitted diseases or pelvic infections. Nor is it suitable in case of diseases that affect the blood circulation (lupus, high blood pressure, diabetes...) or liver disease.

What complications can there be?

It may not be correctly placed, it may come out or get infected (all these complications are rare). In the unlikely case of getting pregnant wearing an IUD, there is a higher risk of having a pregnancy outside the womb (ectopic pregnancy).

When can it be fitted?

It should be fitted (and removed) by your doctor in his medical office, with special tweezers. It should preferably be fitted during your period. For the next 3 days you should avoid having sex and using tampons.

When should it be replaced?

Copper IUDs last between 5 and 12 years, according to the model. Progestin IUDs last 7 years.

What happens if you forget to have it replaced?

It becomes less effective and there is more risk of getting pregnant.

How long can this method be used?

For as long as necessary, as long as you want to avoid pregnancy and you still have your periods (until the menopause, when menstruation stops).