

# Breastfeeding and Birth Control



## How do I decide what birth control method is best for me while I am breastfeeding?

Choosing a method of birth control is very personal. First, answer the following questions:

- Do you want to have more children?
- How much spacing between births do you want for your children?
- Do you smoke or have you had any health problems, such as liver disease or a blood clot?

Talk about the answers to each of these questions with your health care provider to help you choose the best method for you.

## Can I use breastfeeding as my birth control?

Using breastfeeding as your birth control (the lactational amenorrhea method) can be a good way to keep from getting pregnant in the first months after the baby is born. Each time your baby nurses, your body releases a hormone called prolactin, which stops your body from making the hormones that cause you to ovulate (release an egg). If you are not ovulating, you cannot get pregnant.

The lactational amenorrhea method works only if:

- you have not started your period yet.
- you are breastfeeding only and not giving your baby any other food or drink.
- you are breastfeeding at least every 4 hours during the day and every 6 hours at night.
- your baby is less than 6 months old.

When any 1 of these 4 things is not happening, you no longer have good protection from getting pregnant, and you should use another form of birth control.

## What birth control methods are safe for me to use while I breastfeed?

### Methods without hormones

Methods without hormones do not affect you, your baby, or your breastfeeding.

#### *Methods without hormones that are the most effective*

- The copper intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) (ParaGard) is a small, T-shaped device that is inserted into your uterus (womb) through the vagina and cervix. The copper IUD lasts for 10 years.
- Sterilization (getting your tubes tied or your partner having a vasectomy) is very effective, but it is permanent. You should choose sterilization only if you do not want to have more children.

#### *A method without hormones that is effective*

- The lactational amenorrhea method described above is effective for the first 6 months.

#### *Methods without hormones that are less effective*

- Natural family planning is monitoring your body for signs of ovulation and not having sex when you think you are ovulating. This method is reliable only if you are having regular periods every month.
- Barrier methods (condoms, diaphragms, sponges, and spermicides) are used at the time you have sex. These methods are effective only if you use them correctly every time.

## Methods with hormones

Birth control methods that use hormones can be used while you are breastfeeding. They may have a small effect on lowering the amount of milk you make. All hormones will get into your breast milk in very small amounts, but there is no known harm to your baby from this small amount of hormone in breast milk.

### *Progestin-only methods*

These methods use only 1 hormone, called progestin. You can start them right after your baby is born or wait 4 to 6 weeks to make sure your milk supply is good.

- Progestin-only pills (“minipills”): If you like to take pills every day, you can use the minipill. In order for this pill to work well, you have to take 1 at the same time each day. When you stop breastfeeding, you should start pills that have both estrogen and progestin because they are better at keeping you from getting pregnant.
- Progestin IUD (Mirena): The progestin IUD is shaped and inserted into the uterus like the copper IUD. It works for up to 5 years. Both IUDs are usually inserted 4 to 6 weeks after the baby is born.
- Progestin implant (Implanon or Nexplanon): The progestin implant is a small matchstick-sized flexible rod. It is placed into the fatty tissue in the back of your arm. It works for up to 3 years.
- Progestin shot (Depo-Provera): The progestin shot is given every 3 months.

### *Combined estrogen and progestin methods*

These methods use 2 hormones, called estrogen and progestin. These methods increase your risk of a blood clot, which is already higher than normal after you have a baby. You should not use them until your baby is at least 6 weeks old. The combined methods are not recommended as the first choice for women who are breastfeeding. If a combined method is the one that you feel will be best for you to prevent getting pregnant, these methods are okay to use while breastfeeding.

- Combined birth control pills: You take a pill each day.
- Vaginal ring (NuvaRing): The ring is worn in the vagina for 3 weeks then left out for 1 week before you put in a new ring.
- Patch (Ortho Evra): The patch is placed on your skin and changed every week for 3 weeks then left off for a week before putting a new patch on a different area of your skin.

## For More Information

### Lactational Amenorrhea Method

<http://www.arhp.org/Publications-and-Resources/Patient-Resources/Fact-Sheets/Breastfeeding>

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