

# Choosing a Method of Birth Control if Breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding, there are some things you need to know before you choose a birth control method. There are many types of birth control available today. This information will help you pick the method that is right for you.

## Information for Breastfeeding Women



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### HOW DO I CHOOSE WHICH METHOD OF BIRTH CONTROL IS BEST FOR ME?

Your choice depends on a number of things such as age of your baby, need for temporary or permanent protection against pregnancy, feelings about having another baby, and you and your partner's comfort levels with a method of birth control.

### HOW SOON AFTER MY BABY IS BORN CAN I START USING BIRTH CONTROL?

Some methods of birth control can be used right after your baby is born. Others should be used only after your baby is older. The chart below lists when each birth control method can be used. **Talk with your doctor for more information.**

## WHEN METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL CAN BE USED

BIRTH CONTROL METHOD	USE SIX WEEKS AFTER BIRTH	USE SIX WEEKS-TO-SIX MONTHS AFTER BIRTH	USE MORE THAN SIX MONTHS AFTER BIRTH
Emergency contraceptive pill	Yes	Yes	Yes
Combined birth control pill	No	No	Yes
Progesterone-only birth control pill	No	Yes	Yes
Progesterone shot	No	Yes	Yes
Diaphragm/cervical cap	No	Yes	Yes
Spermicide	Yes	Yes	Yes
Condom	Yes	Yes	Yes
Copper (plain) IUD	Yes	Yes	Yes
IUD with hormones	No	Yes	Yes
Female sterilization	Yes	Yes	Yes
Natural family planning	No	Yes	Yes
Lactational amenorrhea method	Yes	Yes	No

Source: World Health Organization: *Improving access to quality care in family planning – medical eligibility criteria for initiating and continuing use of contraceptive methods*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Geneva: World Health Organization, Family and Reproductive Health Division, 2000. WHO/RHR/00.02.

## WILL BREASTFEEDING KEEP ME FROM GETTING PREGNANT?

Using breastfeeding for birth control is called the “lactational amenorrhea method” (LAM). It can be very effective, but only if:

- Your baby is less than six months old **and**
- Your baby gets all of his or her food from breastfeeding (no formula or cereal) **and**
- You have not had a period since your baby was born.

If **all three** of the above are true for you, your risk of getting pregnant is about 2%. This is because you are very unlikely to ovulate (release an egg from the ovary) under these conditions.

If any of these things are not true for you, you must use another method of birth control if you do not want to get pregnant.

## WHAT ABOUT OTHER NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING METHODS?

Natural family planning methods are also called “fertility awareness-based” family planning. To use these methods you have to be able to tell when you are ovulating. When you are breastfeeding this can be very difficult to do, especially when your baby is very young. As your baby gets older it gets easier to tell when you are ovulating.

If you want to use a natural family planning method of birth control, it is very important that you understand how to use it properly. **Talk with your doctor** about where to learn about natural family planning methods.

## CAN I USE A DIAPHRAGM WHEN I AM BREASTFEEDING?

A diaphragm is a barrier method of birth control. Other barrier methods include cervical caps, spermicides and condoms. Breastfeeding women can safely use all of these.

Condoms and spermicides can be used at any time after your baby’s birth.

A diaphragm or cervical cap should be used only after your uterus shrinks back to its normal size. This is usually six weeks after your baby’s birth.

If you were using a diaphragm or cervical cap before your baby was born, you may need a different size after you have your baby.

If you use your old one you may get pregnant if it does not fit properly. Your doctor will check the size you need. It is important to have this done before the first time you have intercourse after your baby’s birth.

## IS IT SAFE TO USE AN IUD WHEN I AM BREASTFEEDING?

There are two types of IUDs. Some have hormones in them and others don’t.

Breastfeeding women can safely use IUDs without hormones in them. Some types of IUDs can be put in the uterus immediately after delivery, but it is best to wait four-to-six weeks after delivery for other types.

If the IUD is put in too soon it may fall out or tear the uterus. **Talk with your doctor** about which kind of IUD is best for you and when it should be put in.

IUDs with hormones in them should only be used after your baby is six weeks old. This is because it is not known if the hormone is safe for a baby less than six weeks old.

## CAN I GET MY TUBES TIED IF I AM PLANNING TO BREASTFEED?

Getting your tubes tied is also called “female tubal sterilization.” This surgery should not affect your milk supply or your ability to breastfeed.

If you would like to get your tubes tied, **talk with your doctor** before you have your baby. For best results, this is usually done in the week after your baby is born or after your baby is six weeks old.

You and your partner may want to consider male sterilization. This is called a vasectomy.

**Ask your doctor** for more information as both these methods are permanent.

## CAN I TAKE THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL WHEN I AM BREASTFEEDING?

There are several kinds of birth control pills. Some can be used soon after your baby is born and others should only be used once the baby is older.

Birth control pills that contain only progesterone are sometimes called the “mini-pill.” These are usually started at six weeks. Most physicians agree that this pill will not decrease your milk supply.

“Combined” birth control pills contain estrogen and progesterone. This kind of birth control pill should only be used after your baby is six months old because it may decrease your milk supply.

Breastfeeding mothers can safely use the emergency contraceptive pill (“morning after pill”) no matter the ages of their babies.

## WHAT ABOUT THE BIRTH CONTROL SHOT?

The progesterone shot can be used after your baby is six weeks old.

## HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY BIRTH CONTROL PILL OR SHOT IS DECREASING MY MILK SUPPLY?

The following changes may mean that you do not have enough milk for your baby:

- Your baby is not as happy as usual
- Your baby does not gain weight as well as he or she should
- Your breasts feel less full than they used to feel

If these changes happen right after starting the birth control pill or getting the birth control shot, the pill or shot is probably reducing your milk supply. **See your doctor** to discuss if this is the case.

## WHAT ARE MY CHANCES OF GETTING PREGNANT?

For most methods of birth control your chances of getting pregnant depend on how carefully you use them. That is why in the “real world” most methods of birth control are not as effective as they would be with perfect use.

The “perfect use” and “real world” chances of getting pregnant when using the different methods of birth control are illustrated in the chart below.

NUMBER OF PREGNANCIES PER 100 WOMEN DURING FIRST YEAR OF USE		
BIRTH CONTROL METHOD	‘PERFECT USE’	‘REAL WORLD USE’
Combined birth control pill	0.1	5.0
Progesterone-only birth control pill	0.5	5.0
Progesterone shot	0.1	N/A
Diaphragm/cervical cap	6.0	20.0
Spermicide	6.0	26.0
Condom	3.0	14.0
Copper (plain) IUD	0.6	0.8
IUD with hormones	1.5	2.0
Female tubal sterilization	0.5	0.5
Natural family planning	1.0 – 9.0	20.0
Lactational amenorrhea method	0.5	2.0

Source: Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc. Birth Control: Facts About Birth Control. PFFA [www.plannedparenthood.org/bc.bcfacts/htm](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc.bcfacts/htm). 1998–2002.

## WHAT IF I GET PREGNANT WHEN I AM STILL BREASTFEEDING?

You can continue to breastfeed while you are pregnant as long as you have not had a premature labour, there is no risk of a premature birth with this pregnancy, you have no bleeding and you are gaining a proper amount of weight. For more information about breastfeeding during pregnancy, **see your doctor.**

## IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW BEFORE I CHOOSE A BIRTH CONTROL METHOD?

If you have trouble making enough milk for your baby, you need to be especially careful which method of birth control you choose. It is important that you **not** use one of the methods that might decrease your milk supply, such as birth control pills and shots.

You might have a higher chance of having trouble making enough milk for your baby if you have or have had:

- breast reduction surgery
- twins or triplets
- a premature baby
- not enough milk for a previous baby
- one breast much smaller than the other
- thyroid problems that are not being treated
- some kinds of infertility
- a problem making enough of the milk hormone prolactin

If you have or have previously had any of these things, be sure to **tell your doctor** before you choose a birth control method.



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