

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT!

In my type of work, the saying: “don’t leave home without it” means something quite different. Sexual intimacy with a partner can send you to seventh heaven but let’s face it, pleasure can come crashing down if you don’t come prepared...

The first methods of contraception that were probably used (aside from sexual abstinence) are coitus interruptus, certain barrier methods, and herbal methods. Coitus interruptus (withdrawal of the penis from the vagina prior to ejaculation) is not a particularly reliable method of contraception, as few men have the self-control to correctly practice the method at every single act of sexual intercourse. Although it is commonly believed that pre-ejaculate fluid can cause pregnancy, modern research has shown that pre-ejaculate fluid does not contain viable sperm.

Not all methods of birth control offer protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Abstinence from all forms of sexual behaviour will protect against the sexual transmission of these infections. The male latex condom offers some protection against some of these diseases with correct and consistent use, as does the female condom, although the latter has only been approved for vaginal sex. However, the female condom can be difficult to use. Frequently a woman can improperly insert it, even if she believes she is using it correctly. The remaining methods of birth control do not offer significant protection against the sexual transmission of these diseases. However, so-called STIs may also be transmitted non-sexually, and therefore, abstinence from sexual behaviour does not guarantee 100 percent protection against STIs. For example, HIV may be transmitted through contaminated needles which may be used in intravenous drug use, tattooing, body piercing, or injections. Health-care workers have acquired HIV through occupational exposure to accidental injuries with needles.

While the most common form of contraception is the condom, coming in a close second are those methods that rely on hormones to alter the woman’s reproductive system to prevent pregnancy. These include the Pill, the mini-Pill, hormonal contraception in the form of injections, patch or ring and implants such as Implanon which provide slow release of the hormone into the body over a sustained period of time. While many women may welcome the fact that, eventually, men may also be taking responsibility for contraception, others insist that they would not trust men to be fully protected. There are so many pros for using this type of protection but remember that you still need to use a condom to protect yourself from STIs. Also if you are a smoker or have blood clotting issues this may not be the best solution for you.

Aside from surgery (vasectomy for the men or tubal ligation for women) which are considered permanent, you can choose between the intra uterine device (IUD) and the diaphragm. The IUD is made of flexible plastic with fine copper wire wound firmly around it, the device is placed in a woman’s uterus. A nylon string is attached to the stem of the IUD for easy removal by a doctor or nurse practitioner. Mirena is one such example. Because the copper IUD is toxic to sperm it prevents fertilisation of the egg. The IUD also stops any fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus. The IUD has a success rate of 99%. The copper IUD provides up to 5 years of contraception, and has no negative impact on future fertility, once removed.

The diaphragm is a dome-shaped rubber cap with a flexible rim which fits inside the vagina, covering the cervix. The diaphragm is effective between 85% and 94% depending on how correctly it is used every time a couple has sex. The diaphragm acts as a barrier between the sperm, the fertile mucous in the cervix and the egg produced by the ovary. When you visit your doctor you will be fitted for a diaphragm as well as shown how to use it correctly. For best use, spermicide (a gel which kills sperm) should be used concomitantly.

Don't forget to discuss your contraception choices with your doctor. Once you have taken your responsibilities to protect yourself and your partner, it is time to start the climb to seventh heaven!

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