

Birth Control after Childbirth

Planning the next pregnancy after giving birth is a very personal decision. It is important to give your body time to renew itself so the baby has the best chance for good health.

Pregnancy can occur within four to six weeks after giving birth. This can be before your menstrual period returns due to ovulation before your period starts.

LAM (Lactational Amenorrhea Method)

Breastfeeding can reduce the chance of pregnancy by 98 percent but only if all of these things are true:

- Monthly periods have not returned.
- The baby is less than six months old.
- The baby is breastfed around the clock with no longer than four hours between daytime feedings and no longer than six hours between night feedings.
- No other foods are given (the only additional intake is expressed breast milk and/or vitamins).

Condoms

Condoms can be an effective method of birth control especially if used with a spermicide. Some women find that the vagina is dryer after birth, especially if they are breastfeeding. Lubricated condoms and spermicide foam or jelly can make sex more comfortable. Condoms can give some protection from infection. Female condoms are also available. They are made with polyurethane and may be used by persons with latex sensitivity. Only water-based lubricants can be safely used with condoms.

Birth Control Pills

The combined birth control pill contains estrogen and progesterone. For women who are breastfeeding the combined birth control pill may be prescribed once breastfeeding is well established (usually six weeks after birth). The estrogen in the pill may lead to a decrease in milk supply, which should be discussed with your doctor. A small amount of estrogen can be passed in the breast milk to the baby; the long-term side effects are not known.

The progestin-only pill, often called the mini pill, may be prescribed by your doctor because it has little or no effect on the amount of breast milk made. All birth control pills, especially the mini pill, must be taken at the same time each day.

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Depo Provera is a progestin-only product given by injection every 12 weeks. It has little or no effect on breast milk production or infant development. Women who are breastfeeding may wish to wait until their breast milk is established before having their first dose. Women who are not breastfeeding can receive Depo Provera immediately after childbirth.

Evra is a birth control patch that is applied to the skin. A new patch is applied each week for three weeks and then there is a patch-free week when menstruation occurs. For women who are breastfeeding it is suggested that the patch not be used until after the child is weaned from breastfeeding. For women who are not breastfeeding the Evra patch can be applied approximately four weeks after childbirth.

The **Nuvaring** is a contraceptive ring that a woman can insert into the vagina where it releases contraceptive hormones. The ring is worn for three weeks and then removed for one which allows for menstruation. For women who are breastfeeding it is suggested that women wait to use the Nuvaring and chose another type of birth control until the child is weaned from breastfeeding. For women who are not breastfeeding the Nuvaring can be used at approximately four weeks after childbirth.

Spermicides can be foam, film, cream, or jelly that are put in the vagina before sex. They contain a chemical to kill sperm. They work best when used with barriers such as condoms or diaphragms. Follow the package directions.

The **diaphragm** is a rubber cap placed in the vagina to cover the cervix. It must be fitted by a doctor and used with spermicidal jelly. The diaphragm may not fit properly after childbirth; therefore it should be refitted by a doctor at approximately six weeks after birth. The diaphragm can be put in the vagina up to 2 hours before sex and should stay in place at least 6 hours after sex but not more than 24 hours.

The **sponge** is a one-size disposable sponge soaked with a spermicide. It is put into the vagina before having sex. The sponge is less effective in women who have delivered a child than in women who have not. It is best used with a condom.

The diaphragm and the sponge should not be used in the first six weeks after birth, and only after vaginal bleeding has stopped. The risk of toxic shock is higher when any vaginal bleeding is present.

An **IUD** (intrauterine device) is T-shaped plastic device usually wrapped in thin copper wire which is inserted into the uterus by a doctor. An IUD can be left in place up to five years. It is usually inserted at least four to six weeks after delivery.

Fertility Awareness Methods are based on a woman learning when she fertile (can get pregnant) during her monthly cycle. Sex can then be avoided during those times. A trained counselor can help women learn about their own menstrual cycle. Some things that signal fertile and non-fertile times are changes in vaginal mucus and body temperature. Women who have just given birth and women who are breastfeeding can have more difficulty in determining which days to avoid.