

Contraceptive Implant



Quick Facts

A long-acting reversible contraception (LARC). The most effective method of contraception available in Australia.

Method

Hormonal

Effectiveness

More than 99%

Return to Fertility

No delay

Availability

Prescription required; simple insertion and removal by a health professional



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What is it?

The contraceptive implant is a small plastic rod containing a progestogen hormone. Inserted under the skin on the inside of the upper arm, the hormone is released slowly from the implant into the bloodstream over three years.

The contraceptive implant is very flexible and not easily visible. Implanon® and Implanon NXT® are brand names of the contraceptive implant available in Australia.

How does it work?

The contraceptive implant prevents pregnancy by:

- stopping the body from releasing an egg every month
- making the mucus in the cervix thicker, so sperm cannot get through
- changing the lining of the uterus.

How effective is it?

The contraceptive implant is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy and lasts up to three years, but can be removed at any time.

Who can use it?

The contraceptive implant is suitable for women who:

- are looking for very effective and reliable long-term contraception that is 'fit and forget'
- cannot take oestrogen
- have difficulty remembering to take daily contraception
- are breastfeeding.

The contraceptive implant is not suitable for women who:

- have had breast cancer within the last five years
- have undiagnosed abnormal vaginal bleeding.

How is it inserted?

Insertion by a trained health professional only takes a couple of minutes.

1. A local anaesthetic is given to numb the skin.
2. The contraceptive implant is inserted using a special applicator, with no stitches required.
3. A pressure bandage is placed on the arm to reduce the chance of bruising.

When the anaesthetic wears off, some women may experience tenderness and bruising for a few days. A small layer of tissue forms around the contraceptive implant which will keep it in place.

The contraceptive implant should be able to be easily felt by a light touch to the skin, but isn't usually noticeable to anyone looking at it.

There may also be a tiny mark/scar where the contraceptive implant was inserted, which most people don't even notice.

It is useful to make a note of the insertion date, so you will know when the contraceptive implant needs to be replaced or removed. You do not need to have a follow-up appointment with a health professional unless you are experiencing problems.

When can it be inserted?

The contraceptive implant can be inserted at any time that pregnancy can confidently be excluded.

It is effective immediately if it is inserted between day one (first day of bleeding) to day five of a woman's menstrual cycle (ideally). If inserted at any other time of the cycle, back-up contraception (e.g. condoms) should be used for the next seven days.

Advantages

- Very safe and suitable for most women.
- Contraceptive effect lasts for three years.
- Can cause light periods or no periods at all.
- Inexpensive considering how long it lasts.
- Women don't have to remember to take daily contraception.
- Not affected by stomach upsets (vomiting or diarrhoea).
- Can be removed at any time with pre-existing fertility returning rapidly.

Disadvantages

- Bleeding patterns will usually change but in most cases this is not troublesome. If you are experiencing issues with bleeding, discuss this with a health professional.
- Some women experience side effects such as acne, mood changes, abdominal pain or painful periods.

- Certain medications may reduce the effectiveness of the implant, including St John's Wort and some which are used to treat epilepsy or tuberculosis.

How is it removed?

It is recommended that the contraceptive implant be removed or replaced every three years.

1. A local anaesthetic is given to numb the skin.
2. The contraceptive implant is removed through a small cut in the skin, with no stitches required.
3. A pressure bandage is placed on the arm to reduce the chance of bruising.

The contraceptive implant can be removed at any time by a health professional. It is important to consider future contraceptive needs before removing the contraceptive implant, as its contraceptive effects will cease upon removal – discuss this with a health professional.

The contraceptive implant does not protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

SHQ is on Whadjuk land. We acknowledge the traditional owners of country across Western Australia.



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