

## INTRAUTERINE DEVICES (IUDs) – Overview

### What is the intrauterine device (IUD)?

The intrauterine device (IUD) is a small device made of plastic and/or metal that is inserted into the uterus (womb) to prevent pregnancy.

### The two main types of IUDs available in Australia

You can choose either the:

- **Hormonal IUD**

The hormonal IUDs are small 'T- shaped' plastic devices that are inserted into the uterus (womb). The hormonal IUDs contain progestogen. This is a synthetic version of the hormone progesterone made naturally by the ovaries. The hormonal IUDs have a coating (membrane) that controls the slow release of progestogen into the uterus. There are two different hormonal IUDs available in Australia. They are sold as Mirena and Kyleena.

- **Non- hormonal copper IUD**

The non-hormonal copper IUD is a small plastic device with copper wire coiled (wrapped) around the frame. It is inserted into the uterus (womb) where it constantly releases a small amount of copper. There are several different non-hormonal IUDs available in Australia).

### How effective is the IUD?

Both IUD types are among the most effective methods of contraception and more than 99% effective at preventing pregnancy. The IUD can stay in place for 5 – 10 years, depending on the type.

### How does the IUD work?

IUDs affect the way sperm move and survive in the uterus (womb), stopping sperm from meeting and fertilising an egg. IUDs can also change the lining of the uterus, making it difficult for a fertilised egg to stick to the lining to start a pregnancy. The hormonal IUDs also work by thickening the fluid around the cervix (opening to the uterus/womb). This helps to prevent sperm from entering. Sometimes the hormonal IUDs can also stop the ovaries from releasing an egg.

### How do I use the IUD?

The hormonal IUD is inserted inside the uterus (womb) by a trained doctor or nurse. You can choose to have a local anaesthetic or sedation while it is inserted. The IUD insertion takes around 15 minutes but you will be in the clinic for an hour or more.

The IUD has a fine nylon string attached to it which comes out through the cervix (opening to the uterus/womb). The string cannot be seen and it does not hang out of the vagina. If you feel high up inside your vagina, you can check that the string is there and know the IUD is still in place. It is good to do this every month. If the string feels like it is shorter or longer than normal or you cannot feel the string at all, the IUD may have shifted and you should see a doctor or nurse.

### Where can I get the hormonal IUD?

Your doctor or nurse will provide a script which you can take to the pharmacy, who will sell you the hormonal IUD. You will need to return to the clinic to have the IUD inserted. If you do not have a Medicare card it will be more expensive. It will be cheaper if you have a healthcare card.

### What is good about the IUD?

- It is an extremely effective method of contraception.
- Once inserted (put in) you will only need to check the string each month.
- It can last up to 5 – 10 years (depending on the type).
- You can use it while breast feeding.
- No medications stop it from working.
- It can be taken out at any time by a doctor or nurse.
- Once removed your fertility quickly returns to what is normal for you.
- It is another contraceptive option if you have difficulty taking the hormone oestrogen. The Pill (combined pill or oral contraceptive pill) and vaginal ring (NuvaRing) contain oestrogen and progestogen. The hormonal IUD only contains progestogen.

#### **Disclaimer**

*This factsheet is for general information purposes only and should not be relied on as medical information. You should seek specific medical consultation for your individual circumstances.*

### Possible side effects or disadvantages of the IUD

- Both types need to be put in by a trained doctor or nurse.
- You may have extra upfront costs and difficulty accessing a clinic to insert the IUD.
- When it is first inserted some users have period type cramping that usually settles after a few days.
- Your vaginal bleeding pattern (period) will change. Spotting or frequent bleeding is common in the first 3 – 6 months.
- Sometimes the IUD can fall out. This is more common in the first 3 months of it being inserted.
- The hormonal IUD can cause side effects for a small number of users, including headaches, changes to your skin, sore/tender breasts and mood changes.
- In about 1 in 500 users, the doctor or nurse makes a small hole in the wall of the uterus (womb) while inserting the IUD. The IUD can move through the hole and sit in the wrong place. You would then need keyhole surgery to have it removed.
- Around 1 in 300 users get an infection when the IUD is first inserted. This is usually successfully treated with antibiotics.
- It is very unlikely to get pregnant when using the IUD. If you do get pregnant with an IUD, there is a higher chance of ectopic pregnancy. This means that the pregnancy may settle in the fallopian tubes (pathway of the egg to uterus).
- Neither type gives protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

### Differences between the non-hormonal copper IUD and hormonal IUD

There are several differences between the non-hormonal copper and hormonal IUDs.

#### Differences in vaginal bleeding pattern (periods) include:

- After a hormonal IUD has been put in, spotting is common in the first 3 – 6 months. By 6 months around 95% of users will have a light regular period or no bleeding at all (this is not harmful to the body).
- After a copper IUD has been put in, spotting or frequent bleeding is common in the first 3 months. This nearly always settles with time and your regular bleeding pattern will return. For most users, periods are about 50% heavier.

#### Differences in cost include:

- The hormonal IUD is covered by a healthcare card in Australia. It costs around \$6 if you are a health care card holder and around \$37 if you do not have a healthcare card. If you do not have a Medicare card it will be more expensive.
- The copper IUD is not covered by a healthcare card and may cost around \$120. The cost is the same for those who do not have a Medicare card.

#### Differences in side effects include:

- For a small number of users, the hormonal IUD may cause sore/tender breasts, headaches, changes to your skin and mood changes.
- The copper IUD has no hormonal side effects.

#### Differences in medical conditions include:

- The hormonal IUD should not be used if you have breast cancer or have been treated for breast cancer or have severe liver disease.
- With rare exceptions, the copper IUD will not have any known effect on existing medical conditions.

### IUD insertion at Family Planning Victoria (FPV)

FPV provides insertion and removal of the both the hormonal and non-hormonal intrauterine devices (IUDs).

For more information and support or to make an IUD insertion appointment at FPV please contact us:

- T: 03 9257 0100
- W: [www.fpv.org.au](http://www.fpv.org.au)

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