

Fertility After Birth Control

From **WebMD** Health

Q How long does it take to get pregnant after:

- Stopping the pill?
- Removing an IUD?
- Removing Norplant?
- Stopping Depo Provera shots?

A Certain types of birth control have no apparent delay at all. That includes the IUD and barrier methods such as condoms or diaphragms. We use those as gold standards to compare with others.

Oral contraceptives and Norplant implants -- which are not on the market now, but some women may still have them -- have the potential for a month or two of delay of fertility. This is because the ovary may at first ovulate early or late in the cycle.

And there is a potential for [conceiving] twins in the first cycle after stopping the pill or Norplant because you may ovulate two eggs in the first cycle after stopping oral contraceptives. Six months after stopping oral contraceptives, there's no difference in fertility between women who've gone off the pill and those who have stopped using condoms or diaphragms.

Norplant would be very similar to oral contraceptives. It depends on whether all the Norplant implants are removed, what residual active ingredients from the Norplant remain in your body, and what year it was removed. And it depends on how long the implant was in place and how worn out it was at the time of removal.

If it was removed after having the implant for five years, the return to fertility is fairly rapid, just one to two months. Certainly by the end of six months, return to fertility would be the same as with barrier methods.

Depo Provera is the one contraceptive method that does have a delayed return to fertility for some women. The experts disagree how long it takes, but the range is 3-18 months on average.

But no matter what contraceptive method you are stopping, couples need to remember that it often takes a year for 90% of couples to become pregnant.

In the other 10%, some may have fertility issues. But you don't know until you try. If you have difficulties after trying to conceive for a year, consult an infertility specialist.

Q Does duration of contraceptive use affect fertility?

A Duration of contraceptive use does not seem to make a big difference. But there are a number of other factors that can affect fertility.

As women get older, fertility is affected. Women in their mid-30s begin to experience a reduction in fertility. This occurs more rapidly once they are in their 40s. There is no additional effect of duration of contraceptive use at any age.

Other factors that affect fertility are the quality of the eggs and the sperm and the health of the fallopian tubes in the woman. Incidentally, taking the pill may have a protective effect on the fallopian tubes by reducing the chance that a cervical infection with chlamydia or gonorrhea will involve the fallopian tubes and cause infertility. The pill may also reduce a woman's chances of endometriosis, a condition that is another common cause of infertility.

Q Can being on the pill save my eggs and, therefore, prolong my fertility?

A No. Some women think that taking the pill "saves" the eggs, but that's not the case. A woman's eggs are programmed to die after a certain period of time even while a woman is on the pill -- and even when she is pregnant!

Furthermore, the natural end of fertility in most women (menopause) isn't caused by a lack of eggs; it's caused by the decreased quality of those eggs. With each menstrual cycle, a group of follicles attempt to mature. Only one makes it. It bullies the rest and only one or, occasionally, two will go on to create a mature egg that can be ovulated. As we approach menopause, fertility decreases. It is not a question of running out of eggs. It is more a question of the quality of the egg. Remember, the woman has had that egg since she was born. You only need one egg, but you need a good one.

Edited by Charlotte E. Grayson, MD, Mar. 2004, WebMD.

Copyright © 2004, Medscape Patient Education