

## Intra-Uterine Device (IUD): Copper Based

### What is an IUD?

- An IUD is a small piece of plastic that a health care provider inserts into a uterus to prevent pregnancy.
- The most common IUD is T-shaped with a copper wire wrapped around it. Sometimes people confuse IUDs with IUSs. See SERC's Fact Sheet on IUSs for more information on hormonal intra-uterine birth control.

### How does a copper IUD work?

- The copper wire on the IUD changes conditions inside the uterus so that sperm cannot live. The IUD will prevent pregnancy 99% of the time.
- Some IUDs can stay in place for up to 5 years. At this time, it can be removed by a health care provider.

### Where can I get an IUD?

- Talk to your health care provider.
- Some community health clinics stock IUDs and can book an appointment for insertion.
- Some health care providers may first give you a prescription to take to a pharmacy to buy the IUD. After purchase, return to your health care provider for insertion.
- An IUD can be expensive. If cost is a problem, talk to your health care provider or your local community health clinic. There may be programs or supports available to reduce the cost/reduce financial barriers. Visit [www.womenshealthclinic.org](http://www.womenshealthclinic.org) to learn more.

### What can I expect at an IUD appointment?

- The health care provider will examine you to check for pregnancy or any infections.
- Next, they will do a pelvic exam (internal exam). They will insert a speculum (plastic or metal instrument) into your vagina to see your cervix and wash it with an antiseptic solution.
- Next, they will insert an IUD into your uterus through the vagina. It may feel uncomfortable so you may want to ask for pain medication ahead of time.
- The health care provider will leave the two plastic threads or strings that may hang down through the cervix into the vagina. These strings are very thin and do not hang outside the body.
- You may want to check the strings from time to time to make sure the IUD is still in place.

### When should I start using an IUD?

- An IUD can be inserted at any time. Some health care providers prefer to insert them during your period.

### Does an IUD protect me from STIs and HIV?

- No, an IUD is only for pregnancy prevention.
- Use safer sex supplies such as condoms and sex dams every time you have sex to reduce the risk of STIs (sexually transmitted infection) or HIV.
- Getting an STI with an IUD increases the risk of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), which may damage reproductive organs, cause pain, and other serious problems. Get tested for STIs regularly and seek treatment if needed to prevent the risk of PID.

## Are there any side effects?

You may feel some side effects. If they are very uncomfortable or last longer than a few months, talk to your health care provider.

### Minor side effects may include:

- Cramping or discomfort during IUD insertion
- Heavier and more painful periods

### Serious side effects are rare, but can include:

- Ectopic pregnancy (when an embryo attaches outside of the uterus)
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

### What if I want my IUD taken out?

- An IUD is removed by a health care provider. Do not try to take an IUD out by yourself.

### What if my IUD comes out or I can't feel the strings?

- Call the health care provider who inserted the IUD as soon as possible. In the meantime, consider using another kind of birth control such as condoms.
- If your IUD comes out and you think there may be a chance of pregnancy, see a health care provider or pharmacist for emergency contraception (ECP). ECP can work up to 5 days after unprotected sex but is most effective the sooner it is taken.

### Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse. If you need a regular health care provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life Online: e-mail your questions to [thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca](mailto:thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca).
- From a Teen Clinic if you are 21 or younger.
- Online at [www.serc.mb.ca](http://www.serc.mb.ca) or our youth website, [www.teentalk.ca](http://www.teentalk.ca).