

# Copper IUD

The Copper IUD, or intrauterine contraceptive device, is a non-hormonal small plastic device with copper wrapped around the frame/stem. It is inserted into the uterus (womb) by a trained doctor and can stay in place for 5–10 years, depending on the type, to prevent pregnancy.

## How does it work?

The Copper IUD stops sperm from meeting and fertilising an egg. It also makes it difficult for the egg to stick to the lining of the uterus to start a pregnancy. Copper IUDs can also be used as an emergency method of contraception within 5 days of unprotected sex, or 5 days after expected ovulation (release of an egg from the ovary).

## How effective is it?

The Copper IUD is more than 99% effective – that is, if 100 people used it for a year, one of them might become pregnant. It is much more reliable than the contraceptive pill (also known as “the Pill”), as there is no need for you to remember to take a pill every day. No contraceptive is 100% effective.

## Will it work immediately?

When a Copper IUD is put in, it starts working straight away to stop pregnancy.

Your doctor will discuss with you the best time to have a Copper IUD inserted, as they first need to check you are not already pregnant. It can also be inserted immediately after an abortion.

## How long will it last?

The Copper IUD is a good method for those who want a long term, reversible, convenient contraceptive, as it can last up to 5–10 years, depending on the type of IUD (although it can be removed at any time).

You should keep a record of the date that replacement is due and arrange for replacement no later than this date

## What are the side effects?

A Copper IUD will not affect your hormones. Some people may have some period type cramping when the IUD is first put in, but this will usually go away after a few days.

Some people can have heavier, longer or more painful periods, or spotting between periods in the first few months of use. This often settles but may not.

If you are worried about any symptoms you think may be caused by the IUD, contact us on **1300 888 022**, or your doctor.

## What if I want to stop using the Copper IUD? Is it reversible?

The Copper IUD is easily removed by a doctor and there is no delay in being able to get pregnant. It is important that you start using another form of contraception straight away if you don't want to become pregnant.

## Who should not use a Copper IUD?

Before having a Copper IUD inserted, you need to let your doctor know if you:

- May be pregnant
- Have had a history of any unusual vaginal bleeding
- Have a history of painful or heavy periods
- Have fibroids or other abnormalities in the uterus
- Have an existing Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) or pelvic infection
- Have had an abnormal Cervical Screening Test and are waiting for treatment
- Are allergic to copper or have Wilson's disease
- Have had previous problems using an IUD.

Your doctor will talk with you about your contraceptive options and help you decide whether a Copper IUD is the best method for you.

## What if I am breastfeeding?

Copper IUDs are a safe method of contraception if you are breastfeeding and can be inserted 4 weeks after birth.

## Will my partner or I feel the device during sex?

Neither you nor your partner should feel the IUD during sex. If you experience any pain or discomfort, you should have the position of the IUD checked by your doctor.

## What else should I consider?

If you experience pain during sex, continuous lower tummy pain, fever and/or unusual and persistent vaginal discharge, you may have an infection. Please see your doctor if this occurs. Infections are uncommon (around 1 in 300).

An IUD can sometimes fall out, with this happening in around 1 in 20 users (usually in the first year of use) and is more common in those who have very heavy periods.

It is very unlikely that you will get pregnant with a Copper IUD. If you do get pregnant with a Copper IUD there is a higher chance of an ectopic pregnancy. This means that the pregnancy forms in the fallopian tubes (thin tubes that transport the egg from the ovary

to the uterus) rather than in the uterus. If you suspect you may be pregnant, it is important to seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Although rare (1 in 500), there is a possibility that an IUD may cause a small hole in the uterus (womb) at the time of insertion. This risk is increased if you are breastfeeding or have recently had a baby. This may require surgery under general anaesthetic to remove the IUD.

Copper IUDs offer no protection against STIs.

## How is an IUD inserted?

A medical instrument called a speculum is placed into your vagina to view the cervix (the same process as having a Cervical Screening Test).

A thin, flexible plastic tube is then used to place the IUD into the uterus. The tube is then removed and threads cut. In some cases, a small amount of local anaesthetic may be used to numb the cervix. The insertion procedure usually only takes a few minutes.

Some people may find getting an IUD put in uncomfortable or feel slightly faint. You may get strong cramps. This is normal and should pass within a few minutes. You can take a mild pain killer before or after the insertion if you prefer.

To avoid infection, do not put anything into the vagina for 48 hours following the IUD being put in. Avoid sex and use pads instead of tampons for two days after the insertion.

A routine check-up is not usually necessary, if you don't have any concerning symptoms.

## How do I check the IUD hasn't moved?

The IUD has two fine nylon strings attached to it which come out through the cervix. The strings don't hang out of the vagina, but if you feel high up inside your vagina you can feel for the strings to check the IUD is correctly in place. As the strings are very fine they usually stick together, so you will probably feel only "one" string.

First, wash your hands and get into a squatting position (as you would to insert a tampon) so you can put one or two fingers deep into your vagina. By reaching right up inside the vagina you will feel the cervix at the far end (which feels like the tip of your nose). You should be

able to feel the strings coming through the cervix. Checking for the strings may sometimes be difficult.

If you cannot feel the strings at any time or if you feel anything unusual such as a hard piece of plastic, you should contact your doctor and use an alternative method of contraception until the placement of the device has been checked. You may require an ultrasound to check the position of the device.

You should check for strings once a month after each period, as the device won't be effective if not correctly placed.

### How is the IUD removed?

Always see a doctor for removal of an IUD and never try to remove it yourself! Taking out an IUD is usually easier and less uncomfortable

than putting one in. It usually only takes a few minutes. The Copper IUD can be removed at any time but you should avoid unprotected sex in the 7 days before removal.

### Can I get a new one inserted when I have the old one removed?

Yes, if you want ongoing, reliable contraception a new IUD can be put in at the same time the other one is removed.

### Where can I get it?

You can purchase the device from us at the time of insertion. The Copper IUD must be inserted by a trained doctor and is available from one of our centres, a gynaecologist, some GPs or a family planning centre.



**Call** 1300 003 707

**Visit** [msiaustralia.org.au](https://msiaustralia.org.au)

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