

Ten facts and myths about contraception

This leaflet provides information to help answer any questions that you and your partner may have about contraception. If you have any further questions, please speak to your GP or the nurse looking after you.

Myth 1: I'm breastfeeding so I can't get pregnant

Breastfeeding is a very good method of contraception. If you are breastfeeding on demand, have not had a period and your baby is under six months old, your chances of getting pregnant are less than 2%. Your chances of pregnancy will increase when your baby is older than six months, when you have had a period or if you are supplementing your breastfeeding.

Nearly all methods of contraception are suitable for you to use when you are breastfeeding. Most importantly, the hormones in some methods do not affect the milk or your baby. You can discuss all the methods with your midwife, doctor or clinic staff before or after your baby is born.

Myth 2: I don't need contraception because we only have sex when it is safe

Natural family planning works well for some people. However, it can be very difficult, especially at first, and you have to know your own body well.

A woman can get pregnant for up to 24 hours after she releases an egg (ovulates) and sperm can live in your fallopian tubes for up to seven days, so having sex before you release your egg can also result in pregnancy.

A woman's menstrual cycle is regular most of the time, however the time of ovulation can change because of different things like colds or flu, stress or medication. This means that knowing the time of ovulation and any "safe" days can be difficult.

In order to successfully use a natural family planning method of contraception, a woman must carefully monitor her menstrual cycle and know when she is ovulating. Your local clinic can help you learn how to do this.

Myth 3: My partner pulls out so I won't get pregnant

"Pulling out" or withdrawing before the man ejaculates or "comes" is not a reliable method of contraception. This is because, some ejaculate (fluid that contains sperm) may be released before the man actually ejaculates and this can lead to pregnancy.

Myth 4: Hormonal contraception causes cancer

Many women worry about the long-term effects of taking hormones. A lot of research has been done which shows that hormones do not increase the overall risk of cancer – some studies suggest that there is a slightly increased risk of cancers such as breast cancer, where other studies point to a reduction in the risk of other cancers, such as ovarian cancer and cancer of the womb.

If you have any worries about a particular type of cancer you can discuss it with the doctor or nurse at the clinic.

Myth 5: Contraception will make me put on weight

Most women experience changes with weight over their lifetime. Some (but not all) hormonal contraceptive methods can contribute to weight gain. If you are worried about weight gain, tell the nurse or doctor and they will help you choose the method of contraception that is best for you.

Myth 6: I cannot use contraception because of my religion

Most religions support contraception for the health and wellbeing of women and their families. Within religions, different groups may interpret their religious scriptures on this subject differently.

Sexual health services and other health services that provide contraceptive advice and contraception to women recognise that all patients are unique – they can advise you on a broad range of contraception, including natural family planning.

Myth 7: I cannot use contraception because of the side effects I might experience

Some contraception methods do have side effects that you might find annoying. Most side effects will end once your body gets used to the contraceptive method, which usually takes no more than a few weeks. If side effects continue, it is possible to change the method – after all, there are many contraceptive methods to choose from. All you have to do is let a health professional know.

Health professionals want to make sure women have access to the contraception method that is going to suit them best. It is important that you tell a health professional about any concerns you have, so that they can work with you to find the most suitable method for you.

Myth 8: If I use hormonal contraception for a long time it will affect my fertility

No method of contraception (except sterilisation) will affect your future fertility. You will be able to fall pregnant as soon as you stop using your method. Some women who use the injection find it takes them a few months longer to get pregnant.

Myth 9: I have to pay for contraception

In the UK, contraception is free. If you are not registered with a doctor you can get free contraception at a sexual health clinic. To book an appointment at a sexual health clinic in Lambeth or Southwark, please phone **020 3049 4006**.

Myth 10: I have to wait three months after stopping hormonal contraception before I can get pregnant

This is not true. You can get pregnant immediately after stopping hormonal contraception. If you do not want to risk getting pregnant straight away after stopping hormonal contraception, you need to consider using condoms every time you have sex in order to prevent getting pregnant.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about methods of contraception, please contact your local sexual health clinic or GP for advice.

Alternatively, visit www.sxt.org.uk or text a postcode to 07781 470 056 for instant, confidential advice. All texts will be charged at your standard SMS rate.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years. To join:

t: 0848 143 4017 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk

w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk