

Norplant Contraceptive Implants

The Norplant implant method is an effective, long-lasting, reversible contraceptive developed by the Population Council.

How Does It Work?

Norplant provides protection from pregnancy for five years by means of six slender silicone rubber, flexible, non-biodegradable capsules that contain the synthetic progestin hormone levonorgestrel. The capsules are surgically inserted in a fan formation just under the skin of a woman's inner upper arm. The procedure requires a 3-4 mm incision under local anesthesia. No stitches are required. The hormone works to prevent pregnancy by keeping eggs from being released from the ovary and by thickening the cervical mucus, making it difficult for sperm to enter the uterus.

How Effective Is It?

Norplant pregnancy rate is less than 1 per 100 women per year, lower than for the pill, most IUDs and comparable to surgical sterilization during the first three years of use. Norplant becomes effective within a few hours of insertion. All six capsules have to be inserted at the same time, even if the method is to be used for fewer than five years. At the end of the fifth year, the implants become less effective and need to be removed and replaced if desired.

Certain medicines, such as those used to control seizures, may make Norplant less effective.

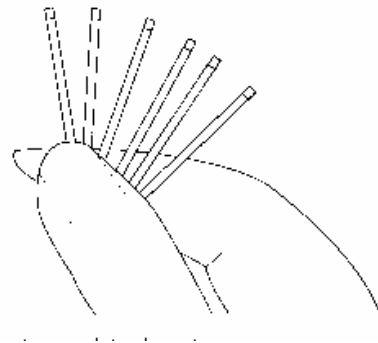
Who May Use It?

Norplant is recommended for women who wish long-term protection but may desire another child in the future or do not wish to be sterilized. It is particularly suited for women who:

- are seeking continuous contraception
- want long term birth spacing
- prefer it over other methods of contraception such as IUDs, oral contraceptives, or injectable hormones
- cannot use contraceptives that contain estrogen
- and prefer a non coitus-related method of contraception.

Who Should Not Use It?

Norplant should not be used by women who are pregnant, breast-feeding, or who have: acute liver disease, jaundice, undiagnosed abnormal genital bleeding, or blood clots in the legs, lungs, or eyes, history of heart attack, chest pain due to diagnosed heart disease or stroke. Women who smoke or have high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol are advised not to use Norplant. High-density lipoprotein (HDL), the "good" cholesterol, levels fall in women using progestin-only contraception.



To assure that a woman who is already pregnant does not use the method, Norplant should be inserted within 7 days of the onset of menstrual bleeding or immediately after an abortion.

What Are the Side Effects?

The most frequently reported side effect with Norplant is change in the menstrual bleeding pattern. Irregularities may include prolonged bleeding during the first month of use, untimely bleeding or spotting between periods, no bleeding at all for several months or, for a few women, for a year or longer, or a combination of all these changes. Bleeding irregularities frequently diminish after several months, and menstruation often becomes regular. Irregular bleeding associated with Norplant could mask symptoms of cervical or uterine cancer. An annual Pap smear with a checkup is recommended.

Other side effects women have noted have been: headache, nervousness, nausea, dizziness, acne, changes of appetite, weight gain, breast tenderness, skin rash, moodiness, excess hair growth, or hair loss. Occasionally an infection



may occur at the implant site. The implants are comfortable and barely visible under the skin. If seen at all, they look similar to veins but without color. There may be a small scar at the insertion site.

Many physicians and health plans advise a 2-3 month trial of an oral contraceptive containing levonorgestrel (e.g. Nordette, Ovrette) to help determine if Norplant will be tolerated.

Is It Reversible?

Once the implants are removed the contraceptive effect wears off quickly and women can become pregnant as rapidly as women who have not used the method.

Norplant implants should be removed at the end of five years. Before that time, however, they can be removed if the user desires to discontinue the method. It is more difficult to remove Norplant than it is to put it in. Make sure your clinician has experience removing Norplant.

Not Protective Against STD's

Although the implants offer excellent protection against pregnancy, they offer none at all against sexually transmitted diseases. Unless you are in a long-term monogamous relationship, you must also use a condom and spermicide.

What Does It Cost?

NORPLANT is available through the Health Service at a cost of about \$400. The cost at a gynecologist's office may be considerably higher as there is usually a charge for the kit as well as an insertion/procedure fee. Removal fees will also be charged at other clinics.

For Further Information:

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/Norplant.htm>

