

your guide to contraceptive injections

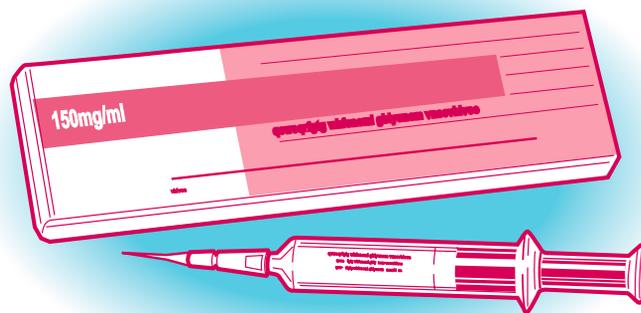
Helping you choose the method
of contraception that's best for you



Contraceptive injections

Contraceptive injections contain a progestogen hormone which is similar to the natural progesterone produced by the ovaries.

There are three types of injection. Depo-Provera and Sayana Press protect you from pregnancy for 13 weeks. Noristerat protects you for 8 weeks; it's not commonly used in the UK.



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How effective is a contraceptive injection?

If 100 sexually active women don't use any contraception, 80 to 90 will get pregnant in a year.

If the injection's always used perfectly, according to instructions, it's over 99% effective. This means that fewer than 1 in 100 injection-users will get pregnant in a year.

If the injection's not always used according to instructions, about 6 in 100 injection-users will get pregnant in a year.

It's important to have your next injection at the right time. If you miss, or are late, having the next injection you may not be protected against pregnancy.

The injection's a method of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC). LARC is very effective because while it's being used you don't have to remember to take or use contraception.

How do contraceptive injections work?

The main way they work is to stop your ovaries releasing an egg each month (ovulation). They also:

- thicken the mucus from your cervix (entrance to the womb), making it difficult for sperm to move through it and reach an egg
- make the lining of your uterus (womb) thinner to stop a fertilised egg implanting.

Where can I get a contraceptive injection?

You can get the injection from a contraception or sexual health clinic or a doctor or nurse at a general practice. All treatment is free and confidential (see *Where can I get more information and advice?* on page 13).

Will I be able to choose which contraceptive injection I use?

You'll usually be offered Depo-Provera or Sayana Press. Your doctor or nurse can discuss with you which contraceptive injection is the most suitable for you.

How's a contraceptive injection given?

For Depo-Provera or Sayana Press, you'll need to have an injection once every 13 weeks.

Depo-Provera is injected into a muscle, usually in the buttocks. It can also sometimes be given in the arm.

Sayana Press is injected just beneath the skin at the front of the thigh or abdomen, with a tiny needle. It's possible for you to be taught how to inject Sayana Press yourself at home but not all clinics and general practices currently offer this option.

You should have a responsible adult with you when you inject Sayana Press in case you have a reaction to it (this is very unlikely).

Noristerat (which is given once every 8 weeks, injected into a muscle) isn't commonly used in the UK.

You don't need to have a vaginal examination or a cervical screening test to be given a contraceptive injection.

Can anyone use a contraceptive injection?

The contraceptive injection can be used by most people. Your doctor or nurse will need to ask you about your own and your family's medical history to make sure a contraceptive injection is suitable. Do mention any illness or operations you've had.

You **may** be advised not to use the injection if you:

- think you might already be pregnant
- don't want your periods to change
- want a baby within the next year
- have breast cancer
- have unexplained vaginal bleeding (for example, bleeding between periods or after sex)
- have arterial disease or history of serious heart disease or stroke
- have severe disease of the liver
- have risk factors for osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). See [Can I use the injection if I'm at risk of osteoporosis?](#) on page 8.

What are the advantages of a contraceptive injection?

- You don't have to think about contraception for as long as the injection lasts.
- It's not affected by other medicines.
- It may reduce heavy painful periods and help with premenstrual symptoms for some people.
- You can use it if you're breastfeeding.
- It's a good method if you can't use estrogens, like those in the combined pill, contraceptive patch and contraceptive vaginal ring.

What are the disadvantages of a contraceptive injection?

- Your periods may change in a way that's not acceptable to you (see [Will a contraceptive injection affect my periods?](#) on page 9).
- Irregular bleeding may continue for some months after you stop the injections.
- Some people may put on weight when they

use Depo-Provera or Sayana Press (see [Will my weight be affected by a contraceptive injection?](#) on page 10).

- The injection works for 13 or 8 weeks, depending on which type you have. It can't be removed from your body, so if you have any side effects, you have to be prepared for them to continue during this time and for some time afterwards.
- There can be a delay of up to 1 year before the return of your periods and fertility after stopping the injection.
- Contraceptive injections don't protect you from sexually transmitted infections, so you may have to use condoms as well.
- Some people experience side effects such as spotty skin, hair loss, decreased libido (sex drive), mood swings and headaches.

Are there any risks?

- Using Depo-Provera or Sayana Press may affect your bones (see [How does a contraceptive injection affect my bones?](#) on page 8).
- Research on the risk of breast cancer and injectable contraception use is complicated and hasn't given definitive answers. People who are currently using the injection **may** have a small increased risk of breast cancer compared to those who don't currently use the injection. Any increased risk is likely to be small and reduce with time after stopping the injection.
- You can have an allergic reaction to the injection, but this is rare.
- As with any injection, there's a small risk of a reaction at the spot the injection is given, which may cause irritation, swelling or a scar.

Your doctor or nurse should discuss all risks and benefits with you.

How does a contraceptive injection affect my bones?

- Using Depo-Provera or Sayana Press affects your natural estrogen levels, and may cause thinning of the bones. This isn't normally a problem for most injection-users as the bone replaces itself when you stop the injection and it doesn't appear to cause any long-term problems.
- Thinning of the bones may be more of a problem if you already have risk factors for osteoporosis (see [Can I use a contraceptive injection if I'm at risk of osteoporosis?](#) below).
- If you're under 18 years old you may use Depo-Provera or Sayana Press, but only after careful evaluation by a doctor or nurse. This is because young people under 18 are still making bone.

Can I use a contraceptive injection if I'm at risk of osteoporosis?

If you have risk factors for osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) it's normally advisable to use another method of contraception. Your doctor or nurse will talk to you about this. Risk factors include:

- being underweight
- smoking
- heavy drinking
- long-term use of steroids
- a close family history of osteoporosis
- certain medical conditions affecting the thyroid and digestive system.

You can help to make your bones healthier by doing regular weight-bearing exercise such as running and walking, eating a healthy diet with enough calcium and vitamin D, cutting down on drinking alcohol, and stopping smoking.

The Royal Osteoporosis Society's website (theros.org.uk) can give you more information.

Should I have my bones scanned before I start a contraceptive injection?

A bone scan before starting a contraceptive injection isn't usually recommended. It may be useful for some people – usually those who've been identified as having risk factors for osteoporosis.

Will a contraceptive injection affect my periods?

Your periods will probably change.

- Most often, periods will stop completely.
- Some injection-users will have irregular bleeding or spotting (bleeding between your usual bleeds).
- Some injection-users will have bleeding that lasts longer and is heavier.

These changes may be a nuisance but they're not harmful.

If you do have prolonged bleeding, it may be possible for the doctor or nurse to give you some additional hormone or medicine that can help control the bleeding. They may also check that the bleeding isn't due to other causes, such as an infection.

Will my weight be affected by a contraceptive injection?

Depo-Provera and Sayana Press are associated with an increase in weight in some people. If you're under 18 years old and overweight before starting Depo-Provera or Sayana Press, you may be more likely to gain weight with use.

When can I start using a contraceptive injection?

You can start a contraceptive injection any time in your menstrual cycle if it's certain that you're not pregnant. If you start the injection during the first 5 days of your period you'll be protected against pregnancy immediately.

If you start it on any other day, you won't be protected for the first 7 days. You'll need to use additional contraception, such as condoms, or avoid sex during this time.

I've just had a baby. Can I use a contraceptive injection?

The injection can be started any time after giving birth. If you start the injection before 3 weeks (21 days) you'll be protected against pregnancy immediately. If it's started later than day 21, you'll need to use an additional method of contraception, such as condoms, or avoid sex for the first 7 days. When using the injection within 6 weeks of giving birth, you may be more likely to have heavy and irregular bleeding.

The injection can be used safely if you're breastfeeding.

Can I use a contraceptive injection after a miscarriage or abortion?

The injection can be started immediately after an abortion or miscarriage and you'll be protected against pregnancy straight away. If you start the injection more than 5 days after a miscarriage or abortion then follow the advice in [When can I start using a contraceptive injection?](#) on page 10.

Can anything make a contraceptive injection less effective?

While the injection's working, nothing will make it less effective. The contraceptive injection **isn't** affected by:

- prescribed medicines, including antibiotics
- any medicines which you buy over the counter at a pharmacy
- diarrhoea
- vomiting.

It's important to have your next injection at the right time – every 13 weeks for Depo-Provera and Sayana Press or every 8 weeks for Noristerat. If you miss or are late having your next injection it may mean that you're no longer protected against pregnancy.

What should I do if I think that I'm pregnant?

Contraceptive injections are highly effective. If you've had your injection on time, it's very unlikely that you'll get pregnant. If you think that you might be pregnant then do a pregnancy test or speak to your doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

Using the contraceptive injection doesn't affect a pregnancy test. If you do get pregnant while you're using the injection, there's no evidence that it'll harm the baby.

How long can I use a contraceptive injection for?

You can continue to use the injection until you're 50 years old, as long as there are no medical reasons not to and you're not at risk of osteoporosis (see How does a contraceptive injection affect my bones? on page 8). If you use the injection for a long time, you should expect to have your risk factors for osteoporosis re-assessed every 2 years. The doctor or nurse may ask you about your lifestyle and discuss whether it'd be more suitable for you to use a different method of contraception.

What should I do if I want to stop using a contraceptive injection or try to get pregnant?

If you want to stop a contraceptive injection, all you need to do is not have your next injection. Your periods and fertility may take a while to return to normal after you stop using the injection. However, it's possible to get pregnant before your first period after stopping the injection. If you don't wish to get pregnant then you should use another method of contraception from the day that your injection would've been due. If you have sex without using another method of contraception you may want to consider using emergency contraception (see Emergency contraception on page 14).

If you want to try for a baby, start pre-pregnancy care such as taking folic acid and stopping smoking. You can ask your doctor or nurse for further advice.

If I have to go into hospital for an operation should I stop using a contraceptive injection?

No. It's not necessary to stop a contraceptive injection if you're having an operation. However, it's always recommended that you tell the doctor you're using a contraceptive injection.

How often do I need to see a doctor or nurse?

You only need to go to the clinic or your general practice when your injection's due. If you have any problems or want to ask any questions between injections, contact your doctor or nurse.

If you've been given a supply of Sayana Press to inject at home, you'll need to see a doctor or nurse at least once a year.

Where can I get more information and advice?

The National Sexual Health Helpline provides confidential advice and information on all aspects of sexual health. The number is **0300 123 7123**. It's open Monday to Friday from 9am-8pm and at weekends from 11am-4pm.

For more information on sexual health visit www.sexwise.org.uk

Information for young people can be found at www.brook.org.uk

You can find details of sexual health clinics and services and details of general practices and pharmacies on these websites.

- England, www.nhs.uk
- Wales, 111.wales.nhs.uk
- Scotland, www.nhsinform.scot
- Northern Ireland, www.sexualhealthni.info and online.hscni.net

Emergency contraception

If you've had sex without contraception, or think your method might've failed, you can use emergency contraception. An intrauterine device (IUD) is the most effective option. Some people will get pregnant even when they take emergency pills correctly.

- An emergency IUD (copper coil) can be fitted up to 5 days after sex, or up to 5 days after the earliest time you could've ovulated (released an egg).
- An emergency contraceptive pill with the active ingredient ulipristal acetate (UPA) can be taken up to 5 days (120 hours) after sex. It's available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy.
- An emergency contraceptive pill with the hormone levonorgestrel can be taken up to 3 days (72 hours) after sex. It's available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy.

Try and get emergency contraception as soon as possible after unprotected sex.

Sexually transmitted infections

Most methods of contraception don't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Condoms and internal condoms (also known as female condoms), used correctly and consistently, can help protect against STIs. If you can, avoid using spermicidally lubricated condoms. The spermicide commonly contains a chemical called nonoxinol-9, which may increase the risk of HIV and other infections.

A final word

This booklet can only give you general information. The information is based on evidence-based research and guidelines from The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the World Health Organization.

All methods of contraception come with a Patient Information Leaflet which provides detailed information about the method. Contact your doctor, practice nurse or a sexual health clinic if you're worried or unsure about anything.

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