

RUH IUS (Intra-uterine system)

An IUD is a small T-shaped plastic device that contains the hormone progestogen. A trained doctor or nurse will put it into your womb. The IUS slowly releases the progestogen hormone. At the moment, the IUS is licensed to be used for up to five years. It is licensed as a contraceptive device by the Department of Health. It is not licensed as a treatment for heavy periods even though it is effective at reducing menstrual loss. The first IUS available in this country is called Mirena.

How does an IUS work?

An IUS is designed as a contraceptive and it works in a number of ways.

- It thickens the mucus in your cervix, so it helps to stop sperm reaching an egg. This can produce a mucus discharge.
- It makes the lining of your womb thin. This reduces blood loss during periods.

Will an IUS affect my periods?

Most women find that after the first few months, their periods become lighter than usual. Some women may find that their periods stop altogether. If this happens to you, do not worry as it is perfectly healthy. Your periods will return to normal after the IUS is taken out.

What are the advantages of an IUS?

- It works as a contraceptive as soon as it is put in.
- It works for at least five years.
- After you have used an IUS for about three months or so your periods usually become much lighter and shorter.
- An IUS usually reduces or gets rid of period pain.

What are the disadvantages of an IUS?

- Most women have slight bleeding between their periods, for the first three months or so. This can be very inconvenient but settles down.

- Pain can be a serious symptom of infection or misplacement. If you have pain you should see a doctor promptly to check the position of the device and make sure there are no signs of infection.
- You may get temporary side effects such as headaches, acne and breast tenderness. If you do get any of these they usually go away after a few months.
- Some women may have cysts on their ovaries in the first few months. These are not dangerous and do not need to be removed. Often there are no symptoms, but some women may have pain. These cysts usually disappear without treatment.
- The womb can push the IUS out (expulsion). This is most likely soon after it has been put in and you may not know it has happened. This is why your doctor will teach you how to check your IUS every month.
- The IUS might go through (perforate) the womb or cervix when it is fitted. This may cause pain, but often there are no symptoms. The IUS may have to be removed by surgery. Perforation is uncommon when an IUS is fitted by an experienced doctor.
- The system can fail. Nothing in life is guaranteed and pregnancies can occur with the device or it might not suit you. If it does not suit you will want it removing. If you miss a period you should have a pregnancy test straight away. If the test is positive your doctor will want to scan you because it is possible to have a pregnancy in the tube (an ectopic pregnancy).

Can anyone use an IUS?

Not everyone can use an IUS and your doctor or nurse will need to ask you about your medical history. Some of the conditions that mean you should not use an IUS are:

- if you have cancer of the womb or ovary
- if you have had a tumour on your liver
- if you have irregular or heavy bleeding from your vagina with no known cause

- if you have had a heart attack or stroke (severe arterial disease)
- if you have an untreated genital infection
- if you have an artificial heart valve.

If I have not had a child can I use an IUS?

Having an IUS fitted might be more uncomfortable if you have not had children but you can use one.

How is an IUS fitted?

An IUS has to be put in and removed by a specially trained doctor or nurse. It is put in either during your period or a few days after. The doctor or nurse must make sure there is no chance of you being pregnant before they fit an IUS. It is easier to put the IUS in during your period as your cervix will be a little softer. The doctor will examine you internally to find the position and size of your womb before he or she fits the IUS.

If can be uncomfortable having an IUS fitted and you might want to have a painkiller or a local anaesthetic. Talk to your doctor about this beforehand. You may get a period-type pain and some bleeding for a few days after the IUS is fitted. You can talk to your doctor about taking pain-relief to help with this.

After it is fitted, do I have to do anything?

An IUS has two threads attached to the end. They hang a little way down from your womb into the top of your vagina. It is unlikely that an IUS will fall out, but if you cannot feel the threads you should see your doctor or nurse. Rarely, your partner may say he can feel the threads during sex. If this is the case, get your doctor or nurse to check the threads and either move them out of the way or shorten them.

Is it safe to use tampons if I have an IUS fitted?

You can use either tampons or towels during your periods if you have an IUS.

How often do I need to see a doctor?

You need to have your IUS checked by a doctor or nurse six weeks after it is put in, and then once a year.

What if I change my mind?

A doctor or nurse can take out the IUS at any time. If you are not going to have another IUS put in, and you do not want to become pregnant, you will need to use an extra contraceptive method, such as condoms, for a week before the IUS is taken out. This is to stop sperm getting into your body. Sperm can live for several days inside your body, and could fertilise an egg once the IUS is removed.

Other questions

This leaflet can only give you basic information about the IUS. Different people may give you different advice on certain points. Contact your doctor or a family planning clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.

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