

Intrauterine contraceptive device

What is a coil?

An intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD) or 'coil' is a small device that is put into your uterus (womb). It has one or two threads on the end. These thin threads hang through the opening of your womb (cervix) into the top of your vagina.

There are two main types of coil. An intrauterine system (IUS) is plastic and slowly releases a hormone called progesterone. An intrauterine device (IUD) is plastic and copper and does not contain any hormone.

Specific information about the IUS and IUD can be found in the 'Contraception' section of the website: <http://www.hopehouse.nhs.uk/contraception/>

Timing of fitting, changing or removing a coil

Fitting

You can have a coil fitted at any time in your cycle as long as we can be certain that you are not already at risk of pregnancy. This is the case when:

- You are using a reliable form of contraception – the combined pill, the patch or vaginal ring, the progesterone only pill, the injection or the implant. Condoms are **only** considered a reliable form of contraception if used consistently and correctly
- You have not had sex since your last normal period
- You have not had sex for 3 weeks and have a negative pregnancy test on the day

Changing

If you are attending for a change of coil and your coil is within date, please abstain from sex for 7 days before your appointment. If your coil has expired, please abstain from sex or use an additional reliable form of contraception for 3 weeks before your appointment.

Removal

If you are attending for a coil removal, please abstain from sex for 7 days before your appointment if you wish to avoid the risk of pregnancy.

The procedure

The coil is fitted inside the womb. The doctor or nurse will examine you internally to establish the position and size of your womb. Sometimes they will check for existing infection. This can be done before or at the time of fitting the coil. You may be offered antibiotics. Fitting a coil takes about 10–15 minutes. It can be uncomfortable and sometimes the procedure is done using local anaesthetic. You may get a period-type pain and some light bleeding for a few days after the coil is fitted. Pain-relieving drugs can help with this e.g. ibuprofen or paracetamol.

What risks are there to having a coil fitted?

Having a coil fitted is a very safe and simple procedure. With any medical intervention there are always some risks, which you must be aware of before proceeding:

- Risk of infection – The risk of developing pelvic infection is 1 in 100 in the first 3 weeks after the coil is fitted
- Risk of expulsion (coil falling out) – The risk of expulsion is 1 in 20, occasionally people are not aware that the coil has been expelled
- Contraceptive failure – The coil has a failure rate of 1-2 in 100. There is a small increased risk of having an ectopic pregnancy (1 in 1000 at 5 years). An ectopic pregnancy develops outside your womb, usually in a fallopian tube. If you do become pregnant with a coil, you need to see a healthcare professional as soon as possible in order for an ectopic pregnancy to be excluded and your coil to be removed
- Womb perforation – The risk of perforation is 1 in 1000. This means making a small hole in the womb wall. This may necessitate hospital admission and a further procedure. The risk of perforation is increased in women who are breastfeeding or within 9 months postpartum
- Changes to periods – You may have irregular bleeding in the first 3-6 months after you have had the coil fitted. With the IUD, some women have heavier, longer and more painful periods. With the IUS periods may become lighter than usual and many women find that their periods stop altogether
- Hormonal side effects – Hormonal side effects occasionally occur with the IUS. These can include acne, headaches and breast tenderness

On the day of the fit

Please take pain-relieving drugs e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen half an hour before your appointment. The appointment lasts for half an hour. However, occasionally women feel faint or unwell during or after having a coil fitted. Therefore there is a possibility that you may be kept in clinic for a period of observation if you feel unwell or kept waiting if someone before you has felt unwell. Please ensure you have eaten before coming to your appointment. Please come without children if possible as there is little space and they can be a distraction.

Follow-up

You will be invited for a check up 6w after fitting.

It is important to learn to check your coil (presence and length of threads) and this will be discussed during your appointment. If you cannot feel the threads this may be because your coil has expelled without you recognising this. Therefore, you may not be protected against pregnancy. Use additional contraception, such as condoms, and make an appointment with a healthcare professional as soon as possible. If you had sex recently you might need to use emergency contraception.

If you feel unwell and have any pain in your lower abdomen, with a high temperature or a smelly discharge from your vagina, you may have an infection. You need to see a healthcare professional as soon as possible.