

Contraception

SO YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT GETTING PREGNANT? FINE, BUT WHAT ABOUT STOPPING CONTRACEPTION AND HOW EASY IT IS TO GET PREGNANT? WE ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS.

For many women, starting to think about babies is both scary and exciting. You may know that you want to try for a baby in the next few months or you may be hoping to wait a little longer. But planning ahead is definitely worthwhile. Thinking about contraception is a good starting point. Maria Simpson, an expert reproduction and sexual health nurse explains, 'Women who are taking the pill or who are having contraceptive injections need to allow enough time for their body to return back to being fertile. This means that if you are due for a repeat prescription or injection, it may be as well to talk it through with the doctor or family planning advisor who can then suggest alternative means of contraception such as condoms.'

LEARNING ABOUT YOUR BODY CLOCK

As well as looking at stopping contraception, Maria also suggests that women use this time to learn about their bodies and that they start to take folic acid. 'It is a good idea for all women to get to know their body clocks as this can help them work out when they are most fertile.' She goes on to add, 'One of the most common myths is that ovulation takes place 14 days after the first day of your last period, but this will not necessarily be the case for all women as it very much depends on your cycle length.'

IRREGULAR PERIODS

While some women's bodies work like clocks, this is not the case for everyone. Many women find that after stopping the pill or injections, their periods are irregular at first, which can come as a surprise. Maria suggests that noting other changes to the body might be helpful. 'Cervical fluid becomes much thinner and clearer just before ovulation, almost like egg white'.

It is also possible to find out when you are about to ovulate by learning about your body's temperature changes. If you want to chart your temperature, take your temperature before getting out of bed in the morning. The temperature of your body drops slightly immediately before ovulation, but rises to a higher level when ovulation has taken place.

For more information on conception, see page 16. If you are planning to get pregnant then start taking folic acid.

A QUICK GUIDE TO STOPPING CONTRACEPTION

Once they have decided to start a family, many couples are anxious to know how quickly they can stop contraception and get on with it! Our quick guide gives you a summary of information, although you may also want to visit your family planning clinic or doctor to find out exactly what's best for you.

Fertility facts

85% of couples conceive within one year

50% of couples manage it in two to three months

10 to 15% of couples seek medical advice for conception



Method	What do I need to do?
The Pill (Combined Oral Contraceptive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finish the packet you are on. ➤ Many doctors advise that you should delay trying to conceive for two to three months so that your body is back to its pattern. Fertility levels normally return during this time. ➤ Use alternative forms of contraception such as condoms. ➤ Most women are pregnant after stopping the pill within a year.
Progesterone Pill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finish the packet you are on. ➤ Many doctors advise that you should wait for one period before trying to conceive. ➤ Fertility levels return quickly.
Depo-Provera (Injectable hormones)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do not renew your injections. ➤ It will take up to twelve weeks for the effects of the injections to wear off. Many women also find that it can take as long as a year before they conceive. ➤ Seek advice from your doctor or family planning clinic.
Progesterone implants e.g. Norplant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This is usually long-term contraception, but can be reversed. ➤ Make an appointment with your doctor to have the implants removed. This is usually a quick procedure done with a local anaesthetic. Fertility levels return quite quickly with 40% of women conceiving with four months. ➤ You might be advised to wait for a period before trying to conceive.
Coil (Intrauterine Device, IUD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make an appointment with your doctor or family planning clinic to have it removed. ➤ You might be advised to wait until your next period before starting to conceive. Fertility levels should not be affected.
Condoms (male and female)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stop using them when you are ready to try for a baby. These don't affect your fertility levels.
Diaphragm and Cap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stop using them when you are ready to try for a baby. These don't affect your fertility levels.
Rhythm/temperature method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This method does not affect your fertility levels. Aim now to have sex during the times when you were previously abstaining.
Withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This method does not affect your fertility levels. While in theory, you could have become pregnant using withdrawal method alone, increase your chances now by not withdrawing.
Spermicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This method does not affect your fertility levels. Stop using spermicide, although consider in future that this method alone may not prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

DR JANE TODD ANSWERS YOUR

QUESTIONS



Q We have been trying for a baby for eleven months now and I am beginning to panic. How long should I leave it before getting help?

A First of all don't panic. Not only will stress reduce your chances of conceiving, you should also know that many couples take twelve months or so. You may, however, wish to consult your doctor, if only for some reassurance, if you have not conceived after twelve months. Don't be embarrassed about going. It is thought that between 10 and 15% of couples talk to their doctors about their concerns about fertility.

Q My new partner wants us to start a family, but he has had a vasectomy. Is there any way in which we can start a family?

A About a third of vasectomies are reversed successfully and so your partner may wish to discuss this option with his doctor. If reversal fails, you both might then consider other options, such as using donor sperm. Your doctor should be able to advise you.

Q I am 35 years old and we are thinking about starting a family. I am a little unsure about how long we can wait, although I know that many women are having babies into their forties.

A First, there is no perfect age to have a baby, as beside the physical aspect, you will also be making an emotional and even a financial commitment. In terms of fertility, there are many factors that affect women's ability to conceive including diet and lifestyle. Age is another. Older women usually take longer to conceive and miscarriage rates can be higher. Whilst a woman in her mid twenties may conceive in two to three months, a woman in her late thirties may need a year or more. This does not mean that you will not be able to have a baby when you are in your forties, but many experts now advise women to start earlier rather than later. So if you feel otherwise ready, you may wish to go for it now!

Q I think I'm pregnant. Shall I keep on taking the pill?

A First of all get a pregnancy test done. If positive, you should stop taking the pill immediately. But don't worry unnecessarily. There is at present no evidence that exposure to the hormones will harm the baby, although you might still like to talk to your doctor.

Q I came off the pill and fell pregnant before having a 'real' period. Is the baby in any danger?

A Ideally it's a good idea to let the body settle down to a normal pattern and to allow the man-made hormones that are in the pill to have worked their way out of your system. Having periods again also means that it is easier to monitor the pregnancy accurately as there may be some question as to how advanced the baby's development is. Fortunately, there is no current evidence to suggest that the baby will have been harmed in any way.

Q I have been on the pill for several years. Will this mean that it will take longer for my body to get back to having normal periods?

A There is no evidence to suggest that being on the pill for a long time makes any difference. Some women's periods get back to a regular pattern after two or three months, while for others it can take a little longer. Do, however, see your doctor if you have not had a period after 3 months.

