

# What You Should Know About Unintended Pregnancy

**N**early half of all pregnancies are unintended—defined as mistimed or unwanted pregnancies. If you are sexually active, you are at risk for getting pregnant.

## Who is at risk of an unintended pregnancy?

Despite advances in effective and safe contraceptive options, nearly 1 in 2 pregnancies in the United States are unintended. Certain groups of women are at even greater risk of unintended pregnancy—especially young women (under age 24) and unmarried women. The rate of unintended pregnancy has also increased among women over 30 years of age. Surprisingly, nearly half of all unintended conceptions occur during a month in which contraception was used.

## Are there any medical risks associated with unintended pregnancies?

Yes, there can be health risks associated with unintended pregnancies. You may not have had time to quit smoking or discontinue using alcohol or caffeine. You might still be engaging in other risky behaviors. You may be taking medications that can be harmful to developing fetuses. The medical risks of unintended pregnancy for the mother may be considerable depending on the woman and may outweigh the medical risks of abortion.

## When during my menstrual cycle am I at highest risk of becoming pregnant?

While it is theoretically possible for you to get pregnant if you have unprotected intercourse at any time during your menstrual cycle, you are at greatest risk of pregnancy during midcycle—or right before you ovulate (when the egg is released from the ovary). Unfortunately, women cannot perfectly predict when they are going to ovulate. The average menstrual cycle is about 29 days—but yours may be shorter or longer. Your lowest risk of pregnancy is during the first two days of your period—and the risk steadily increases through day 13 or 14 of your cycle. If you have a longer cycle, the risk remains higher for longer.

## How can I prevent an unintended pregnancy?

The most effective way to prevent pregnancy—other than abstinence—is to use an effective form of contraception correctly and consistently from the very first time you engage in sexual intercourse. It is also important to prevent unplanned or unexpected sexual activity. Women of all ages should talk with their health care professional to find the most appropriate form of contraception based on their medical history, lifestyle, and cultural and religious beliefs.

## How can I choose among the many contraceptive options?

Your best option is the one that is not only safe and effective, but also one you are most likely to use correctly and

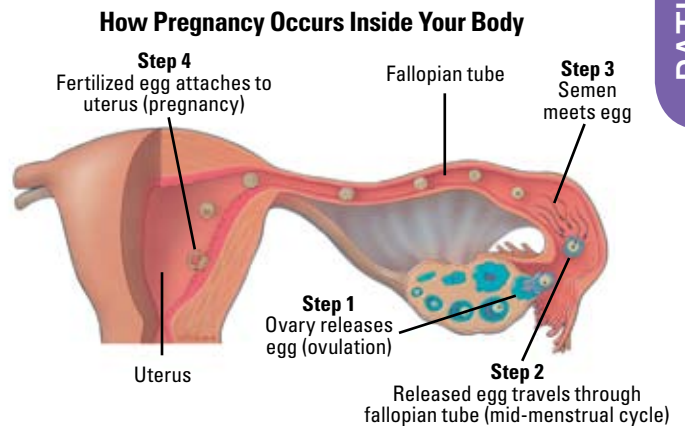


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consistently. Many of the more effective methods must be prescribed by a health care professional—including birth control pills (also known as oral contraceptives or OCs), the vaginal ring, the transdermal patch, hormonal injection, intrauterine device, diaphragm, cervical cap, and the progestin implant. Emergency contraception is available if you had unprotected intercourse within the past 72 hours. Over-the-counter (OTC) options, including male and female condoms, spermicides, and the sponge, have to be used with each act of intercourse. While OTC methods offer better protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), they are much less effective in preventing pregnancy than the methods requiring a prescription.

## What factors do I need to consider?

- Having more than one sexual partner increases your risk for STDs, which can influence your method of contraception.
- Is your partner supportive of you using birth control? If not, methods that are visible (transdermal patch or implant) or methods that are closely associated with each act of intercourse (condoms) are not appropriate for you.
- Can you remember to take a pill every day at the same time?
- How important is it for you to prevent pregnancy at this time of your life?

When talking with your health care professional, be honest about your lifestyle so you can find a method that will really work for you.

## RESOURCES

### Planned Parenthood Organization

[www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/fertility-awareness-4217.htm](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/fertility-awareness-4217.htm)

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/UnintendedPregnancy](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/UnintendedPregnancy)