

## What is the copper IUD?

The copper intrauterine device (IUD) is a small 'T-shaped' plastic and copper device. The copper IUD constantly releases a small amount of copper into the uterus (womb). The copper IUD can also be used for [emergency contraception](#) instead of the [emergency contraceptive pill](#) ('morning after pill').



## How effective is the copper IUD?

It is more than 99% effective at preventing pregnancy and can last for up to 5-10 years.

If you are using copper IUD for emergency contraception, you need to use it within five days or 120 hours after unprotected sex.

## What stops the copper IUD from working?

The copper IUD might not work if:

- It falls out (remember to check for the strings regularly)
- Goes into the wrong position
- It is left in for longer than 5-10 years, depending on the type used

## How do I use the copper IUD?

The copper IUD is inserted inside the uterus (womb) by a trained doctor or nurse.

It has a fine nylon string attached to it which comes out through the cervix (opening to the uterus/womb). If you feel high up inside your vagina, you can check that the string is there and know the IUD is still in place. This string cannot be seen and it does not hang out of the vagina.

illustration of copper IUD in uterus

## **How does the copper IUD work?**

The copper IUD works by stopping the sperm and egg meeting and changing the lining of the uterus/womb. This makes it difficult for a fertilised egg to stick to the lining to start a pregnancy.

illustration of egg not sticking to uterus lining

When it is first inserted (put in) it starts working straight away to prevent pregnancy.

## **Where can I get the copper IUD?**

Your doctor will write you a script and you can get the copper IUD from your pharmacy. Sometimes you can buy the IUD from the clinic. You will need to return to the clinic to have the IUD inserted. If you don't have a Medicare card it will be more expensive.

## **What is good about the copper IUD?**

- It is extremely effective
- Once inserted (put in) you can forget about it for 5-10 years
- It can last up to 10 years
- It can be used while breast feeding
- No medications stop it from working
- It is a choice for those who do not want to use hormonal contraception
- It is easy to remove
- Once removed your fertility quickly returns to normal

## **Are there any side effects from using the copper IUD?**

- When it is first inserted some users have period type cramping that usually settles after a few day.
- Spotting or frequent bleeding is common in the first three months. This nearly always settles with time and your regular bleeding pattern will return. For most users periods are about 50% heavier.
- Sometimes the IUD can fall out. This is more common in the first three months of it being inserted.

## **Can the copper IUD cause any serious health problems?**

- In about 1 in 500 users, the doctor or nurse makes a small hole in the wall of the uterus (womb) while inserting the IUD. The IUD can move through the hole and sit in the wrong place. You would then need keyhole surgery to have it removed.
- Around 1 in 300 users get an infection when the IUD is first inserted. This is usually successfully treated with antibiotics.

- It is very unlikely to get pregnant when using copper IUD. If you do get pregnant with a copper IUD, there is a higher chance of ectopic pregnancy. This means that the pregnancy may settle in the fallopian tubes (pathway of the egg to uterus).

## **Reasons why the copper IUD might not be a good option for you:**

- Heavy periods
- Low iron levels
- A uterus (womb) that is not the usual shape

## **What if I can't feel the strings?**

If you can't feel the IUD string, use condoms until a doctor or nurse confirms the IUD is in the right place. If you have had unprotected sex in the five days before you notice the string missing, you might need emergency contraception.

## **What happens if I get pregnant while I'm using the copper IUD?**

It is important that you see a doctor or nurse as soon as possible and have the IUD removed. The doctor or nurse will also need to rule out a pregnancy in your fallopian tubes. If the copper IUD is removed, there is no harm to the pregnancy and you can continue or have an abortion. If it cannot be removed and you continue with the pregnancy there is a high risk of losing the pregnancy.

## **Can I use the copper IUD after I've had a baby?**

The copper IUD can be inserted straight after you give birth. If not inserted straight after you give birth then you need to wait at least four weeks later. The copper IUD is safe to use if you are breastfeeding.

## **What if I'm using the copper IUD and I want to become pregnant?**

The copper IUD can be removed at any time by a doctor or a nurse. Your fertility will quickly return.

## **What else should I know about the copper IUD?**

- The copper IUD does not protect you from sexually transmissible infections (STIs).
- It is good to write down the date or enter that date into your phone when you had the IUD. You will need to make sure it is taken out before it expires (up to five to ten years after being inserted).

- Your partner might be able to feel the IUD string during sex, but it rarely causes them discomfort.
- Use of copper IUD for emergency contraception is not an abortion.