

Intrauterine Device

Your Guide to the Coil

What is it?

The coil is an effective, long term reversible form of contraception. It is a t-shaped device which sits inside the uterus. It has thin threads which pass through the cervix into the upper part of the vagina. There are two types- the copper coil and the Mirena coil. The copper coil has a copper stem, and the Mirena coil releases a low dose of progesterone-like hormone.

How does it work?

It thickens the normal mucus in the cervical canal, so that the sperm cannot get through to fertilise the egg. It makes the womb environment hostile to sperm and interferes with sperm mobility. It thins the lining of the womb preventing implantation (bedding in of a conception). It may also prevent ovulation in 20% of cycles.

Benefits

- **Lighter periods.** By 6 months 90-94% of women will have scanty or no periods.
- **5 years of contraception-** no need to remember to take the pill.
- **Very low failure rate.** If 1000 women used the Mirena IUS for a year, only one would fall pregnant. This compares with about 10 for the copper coil and 20 for the pill.

When should I ideally have it fitted?

Within 7 days from the start of your period or at any time if you are taking another reliable contraception (not another coil). From 6 weeks after delivery of a baby, preferably 12 weeks- please discuss with GP.

Checking for Threads:

Have a feel of your threads after every period and especially if your period is ever later than usual or lighter than usual. Check your threads if you have symptoms of pregnancy. Ideally check monthly or if you have an unusual bleed/pain.

If you cannot feel the threads, do a pregnancy test. If negative use extra precautions and contact your GP as soon as you can (you may need emergency contraception). If positive, call the GP urgently. Advise them you have been told to say you might have an ectopic pregnancy and that you must speak to a doctor the same day; your GP will refer you for an USS to exclude an ectopic pregnancy outside the womb.

How is it fitted?

A speculum is placed into the vagina, like when you have swabs taken or a smear test. A local anaesthetic gel is squirted through a straw onto the cervix. The coil is passed through the cervix into the womb.

Is it painful?

This varies. Some women do find the procedure uncomfortable and experience period like pains. It is recommended you take 2 Ibuprofen tablets an hour before your coil fit (or Paracetamol if you are asthmatic or have had a stomach ulcer).

What should I do afterwards?

Most women feel fine after a coil fit. However, you will be asked to wait in the surgery for a few minutes after the fit to ensure you are feeling well. It is a good idea to bring someone with you to accompany you home, rather than driving yourself. Plan an easy day.

You need to make a routine coil check appointment 6 weeks later with the Nurse. A coil is effective as contraception one week after insertion. Please use condoms until this point. Please also refrain from using tampons until after your 6-week check. Moon cups should not be used.

Side Effects

- **Bleeding**- at the time of fitting you may have light bleeding for 24-48 hours. It takes about 3 months for the lining of the womb to thin down. During this time, bleeding can be erratic or even heavy at times, but almost always settles after 3-6 months.
- **Infection**- the long-term risk of infection is very low, at less than 1 in 100 over 5 years. This is slightly higher in the first 20 days after insertion. STI screening for Chlamydia prior to fitting will be discussed with you.
- **Perforation**- in less than 1 in 1000 cases, a small hole is made in the back of the womb during insertion. If this is suspected, you will be told, and a follow up appointment made. Coils can very occasionally work their own way out of the womb. If you cannot feel your threads in the future (you will be taught how), you need to contact the surgery.
- **Expulsion**- less than 1 in 20 coils fall out. The risk is highest in the first 3 months and during a period. This may be another reason for not being able to feel your threads.
- **Ectopic pregnancy** - The pregnancy rate with the Mirena is extremely low, as explained above. If you were to get pregnant with the Mirena coil, there is a slightly increased risk of the pregnancy being in the tubes rather than in the womb.
- **Hormonal effects**- a few women experience side effects related to the progesterone in the coil such as bloating, increased appetite, breast tenderness, acne, headaches, and low mood. These usually settle down after a few weeks.

Further Information

If you have any further queries or wish to discuss the coil with a GP, please ring Reception and request a contraceptive counselling appointment. This will be a telephone appointment with a female GP.

Alternatively, you can click on the link below to visit the NHS website and find out more about coils.

[Intrauterine device \(IUD\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)