



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Contraception: Dispelling the Myths

(NAPSA)—Did you know that almost half of pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned? Were you aware that sterilization is one of the most popular forms of birth control among U.S. couples and that about 25 percent of women who have their tubes tied regret their decision? Did you ever wonder why intrauterine contraception (IUC) is one of the most popular methods of reversible birth control among women outside the U.S., yet less than one percent of U.S. women choose this method?

Today's choices in IUC are among the safest, most effective and reliable forms of birth control available. And, they have been carefully studied and approved by the FDA. IUC is also long-acting, readily reversible and convenient—a woman does not need to think about her birth control on a daily basis.

So what could possibly account for such low usage rates of IUC in the U.S., compared to Europe? One explanation could be insurance issues. Felicia Stewart, M.D., chair of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals and co-director of the Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy at the University of California in San Francisco, says "In the past, few insurance plans provided comprehensive coverage for contraception—but almost all covered sterilization surgery. Many women, therefore, didn't seriously consider using IUC. Now, as more plans begin to provide broader contraceptive coverage, the choice no longer has to be based on financial considerations as opposed to health and lifestyle."

Women also should consider that despite a one-time, initial payment for the intrauterine contraceptive and a physician insertion fee, IUC is effective for five to 10 years and the costs are often lower over several years than many other methods of birth control.

In addition, according to Andrea Tone, Ph.D., professor of history at the Georgia Institute of Technology and author of *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America*, "Many women do not know that methods of IUC that are widely used in Europe are available to women in the United States, too. IUC is a form of contraception that U.S. women have been using for many years, and it has improved greatly



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over the years in terms of design and safety, due in large part to rigorous regulation procedures put in place by the FDA."

There are currently two types of IUC available to U.S. women, and having either method inserted is a procedure that can be performed in a health care professional's office in only a few minutes. One of the devices releases copper ions into the uterus and lasts for up to 10 years. The other more recent option is Mirena® (levonorgestrel releasing intrauterine system)—a small, flexible T-shaped system that lasts for up to five years. It can be removed at any time if a woman wishes to become pregnant or discontinue the method.

About eight out of 10 women who want to become pregnant will become pregnant within the first year after removal. Mirena delivers a low dose of progestin directly to the lining of the uterus, and its use may result in shorter lighter periods. In clinical studies, side effects of Mirena were most common during the first months after insertion and subsided during prolonged use. Side effects include acne, back pain, breast tenderness, headaches, mood changes and nausea. Women should understand that IUC does not protect against STDs or pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and that IUC is recommended for women in stable, mutually monogamous relationships who have had at least one child.

So, women who seek a long-term, hassle-free contraceptive should speak with their doctors about IUC.