

A silhouette of a man and a woman in a romantic embrace, about to kiss. In the foreground, centered over the couple, is a large, semi-transparent circular icon containing a padlock, symbolizing contraception or family planning.

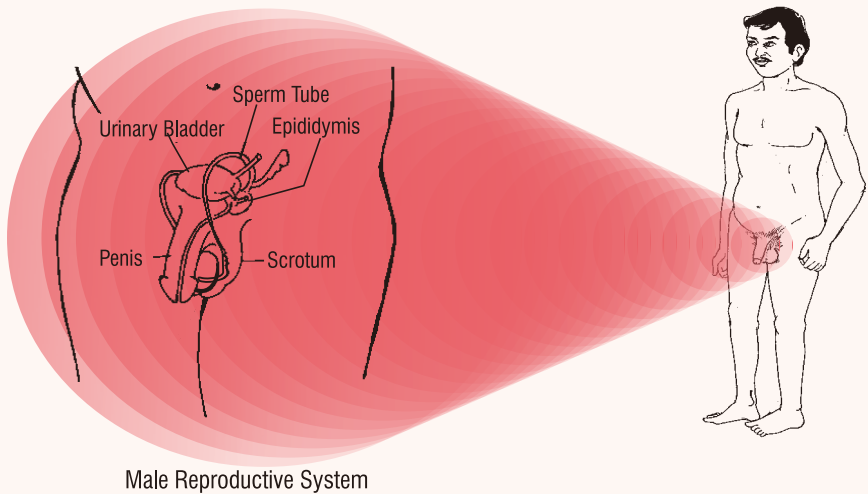
what is contraception?

The use of methods or devices to prevent pregnancy or conception is called contraception or birth control. Contraceptive methods help a couple or a woman to decide the number of children they desire and to have them at a time they choose. By helping a woman limit the number of children she has, or have adequate space between her pregnancies, contraceptive methods help improve the health of the woman and her child.

Before we move on to learn further about contraceptive methods, let us learn about the systems in the human body that make a man and woman to have or not to have a baby.

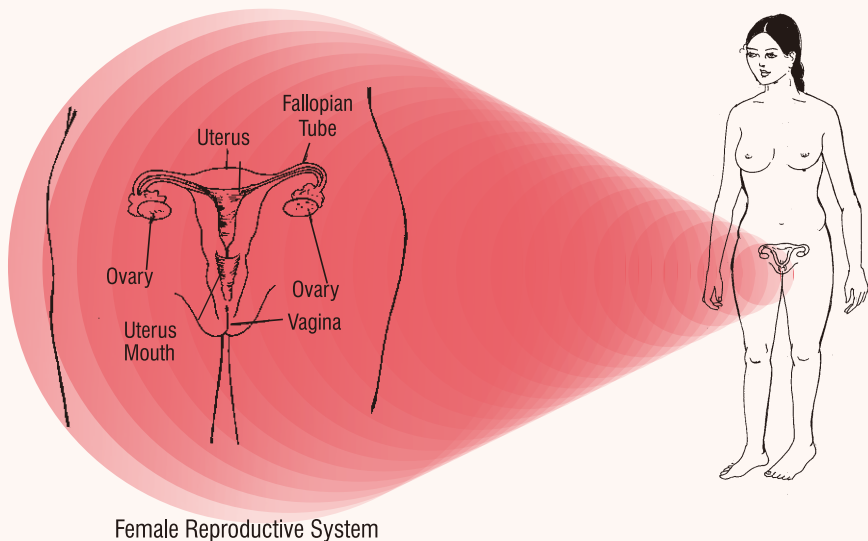
Male Reproductive System

Just behind and below the man's organ – or penis – hangs a pouch called the scrotum which contains two testes - one testis on either side. From the time a boy breaks his voice and starts growing a beard and moustache (called puberty), sperms are continuously produced in the testes, one of which will have to ultimately reach the egg in a woman's body to make a baby! These sperms are stored in the epididymis - a coiled tube that is attached to the testis. During ejaculation, the stored sperms travel from the epididymis through a tube called the vas deferens, and along with the seminal fluid that is secreted by surrounding glands, form the semen, which is forcefully ejaculated through the urethral passage of the penis. At each ejaculation, nearly 40 to 100 million (or 4 to 10 crore) sperms are ejaculated in the 2 to 5 ml semen.



Female Reproductive System

The lip-like vulva in the woman, opens into the vagina of a woman, which is a natural tube-like hollow structure. The vagina further leads to the opening in the neck of the uterus, called the cervix or the mouth of the uterus. The uterus is pear-shaped and is made up of thick muscles. It is located inside the lower abdomen. Attached to the uterus on top are the two fallopian tubes that catch the ova – or eggs – as they are released by the two ovaries – one on each side – every month through finger like attachments. These are the female reproductive organs. From the time a girl attains puberty, an egg matures in one or the other ovary alternately every month, and is released into the adjacent fallopian tube, usually at the end of the second week following menstruation. This is called ovulation.



What is conception?

During sex, when the man's semen is ejaculated into the woman's vagina, only one of the lakhs of sperms manages to swim up and come in contact with the woman's egg in the fallopian tube. This is called fertilization. Once ejaculated, a sperm can survive in the woman's reproductive tract only for around 48 hours. Similarly, the mature egg, once released, is able to survive only for 12 to 24 hours. If the sperm meets the egg within this short time span, fertilization is possible, or else, no! In other words, pregnancy can occur only if sexual intercourse happens within this time period. If fertilization takes place, the fertilized egg travels through the fallopian tube and reaches the uterus in five days. Once it reaches the uterus, the fertilized egg attaches to the inner lining of the uterus and this is called conception. Gradually, this grows into a foetus.

The uterus prepares itself every month with a fresh, soft and blood-filled lining to receive the fertilized egg. If fertilization does not occur within 48 hours of the egg being released from the ovary, i.e., the sperm and egg do not meet within this time, this inner lining of the uterus that has been specially prepared starts to break down slowly, layer by layer. When this inner lining breaks down and starts to shed, it appears as a blood-filled discharge through the vagina. This is called menstruation. Menstruation usually lasts from three to five days and indicates that the conception has not taken place in the previous cycle.

What is contraception?

Any method used to prevent conception is called contraception. Contraceptive methods work in various ways, as shown below with examples for each of the different ways.

- Preventing the maturation and release of eggs from the ovary. E.g. Contraceptive pills, Emergency pills
- Preventing the sperm from coming in contact with the egg by blocking the sperms from travelling up after ejaculation. E.g. Male and female condoms, diaphragm
- Permanently preventing the egg and sperm from meeting each other by blocking/cutting the fallopian tube. E.g. Tubectomy (female sterilization)
- Preventing the fertilized egg from implanting in the cavity of the uterus by placing a copper or drug-laden device in the uterine cavity. E.g. Copper T
- Causing absence of sperms in the semen that is ejaculated by blocking/cutting the male tube or Vas. E.g. Vasectomy (Male sterilization)

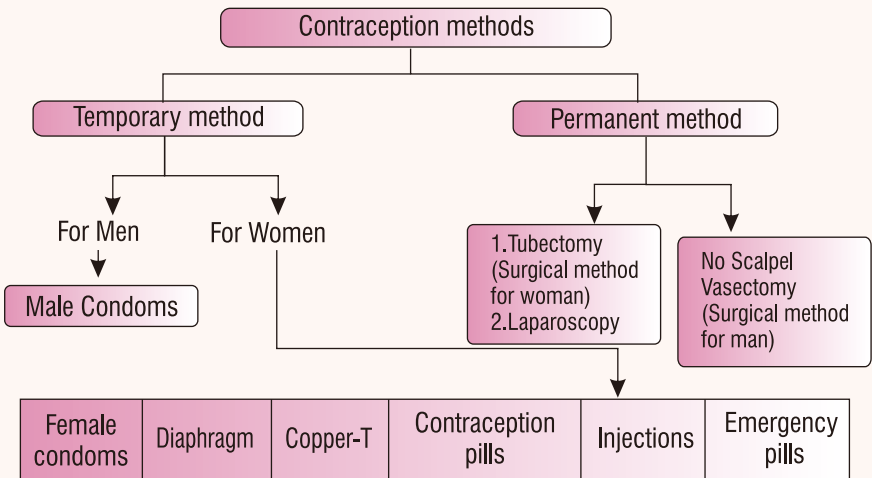
Methods of Contraception

Contraceptive methods can be broadly divided into two types:

1. Reversible methods
2. Permanent methods

Reversible Methods

Reversible methods can be used to delay the first pregnancy or to increase the interval between two pregnancies. By helping women avoid repeated pregnancies close to each other, they help improve both the women's and children's health.



In addition to the above said modern contraceptive methods, there are also a few natural methods that can be used by both men and women.



61, Karumarapakkam Village, Veerapuram (Post).
Thirukazhukundrum (Via) Kanchipuram District,
Tamil Nadu, India - 603109
Telephone: +91 44 27491254, Mobile: +91 98429 19110
Email: ruwsec@vsnl.com, ruwsec.tn@gmail.com
Website: www.ruwsec.org • Facebook: ruwsec.india

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