

University of Wisconsin
Eau Claire
Student Health Service

630 Hilltop Circle, Crest Wellness Center, Eau Claire, WI 54701 Tel: 715-836-4311 Fax: 715-836-5979

Depo Provera: Birth Control Shot

What Is the Birth Control Shot? How does it work?

Often called Depo Provera, this birth control method is given by injection every 12 weeks. The shot contains medroxyprogesterone which is like the hormone progesterone made by your ovaries. It works by preventing ovulation & by thickening the cervical mucus, making it hard for sperm to get through to fertilize an egg.

Of every 1000 women who get their shot on time, only 3 will get pregnant over a year's time.

How often do I need to get the Shot? What if I am late getting the Shot?

An injection is given every 12 weeks.

- *If you are two or more weeks late getting your shot, use another form of birth control [condoms] until you receive your shot - and then for the next 7 days –the time it takes to re-establish contraceptive benefit.*
- When late, you may be required to take a pregnancy test. If you had intercourse in the previous 5 days you may also be advised to use an emergency contraceptive.

What are the drawbacks to the Shot?

Irregular bleeding is the most common side effect. During the first year, periods are usually irregular & spotty bleeding between periods may occur. Sometimes women may notice heavier or longer periods but this rarely causes serious medical problems.

Over time, most women have periods less often & many stop having periods altogether –this is not harmful or permanent. Periods will return after Depo shots are stopped, but it can take several months for your cycle to return to normal.

Decreased bone density has been associated with Depo Provera. It is typically temporary and reversible when the shots are stopped.

To help promote bone health, women using Depo Provera are advised to get regular weight-bearing exercise, consume the recommended daily amount of calcium & vitamin D for age, avoid smoking, and limit alcohol use. *Dairy products and dark green leafy vegetables are foods high in calcium, as are tofu, fortified juice & grains. If calcium and vitamin D intake are poor, supplements might be advised.*

Less common side effects include:

- headache
- breast tenderness
- weight gain/change in appetite
- change in sex drive
- irritability or depression
- hair loss or increase on body

Talk with your healthcare provider about any side effects.

What serious side effects are possible when using Depo Provera?

Notify your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following:

- unusually heavy or prolonged vaginal bleeding
- severe headaches
- depression
- chest pain or trouble breathing
- stomach pain

Other considerations when using Depo Provera?

- Because this is a long acting reversible birth control method, women who wish to become pregnant need to recognize that it may take 9-10 months after stopping the shots for this to happen.
- There are minimal drug interactions with Depo Provera. Tell your healthcare provider if any medications are used.

Remember

*Use of Depo Provera does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections. **Condoms are advised for sexually transmitted infection [STI] protection when using Depo Provera.***

Is Depo Provera a good choice for me?

This birth control method provides long-lasting pregnancy protection. Each shot provides pregnancy protection for 3 months. It does not require remembering to take a daily pill or the motivation to use a method at the time of intimacy.

Depo Provera does not contain estrogen –a good choice for women who can't use estrogen containing products, such as birth control pills.

How safe is Depo Provera?

Most women can use Depo Provera safely. You should not use this method if you:

- are pregnant
- have breast cancer

You may be advised not to use the shot if you have heart disease, stroke, liver disease, unusual/irregular vaginal bleeding, want to become pregnant in the near future, are at high risk for bone loss, or are taking the medication aminoglutethimide.

When can I start Depo Provera shots?

Depo Provera can be started at any time, as long as it is known a woman is not pregnant. If given within 7 days after beginning a period, the contraceptive effect is immediate. If started at any other time in your cycle, condoms must be used for back-up protection for 7 days - the time it takes for contraceptive benefit to get established.