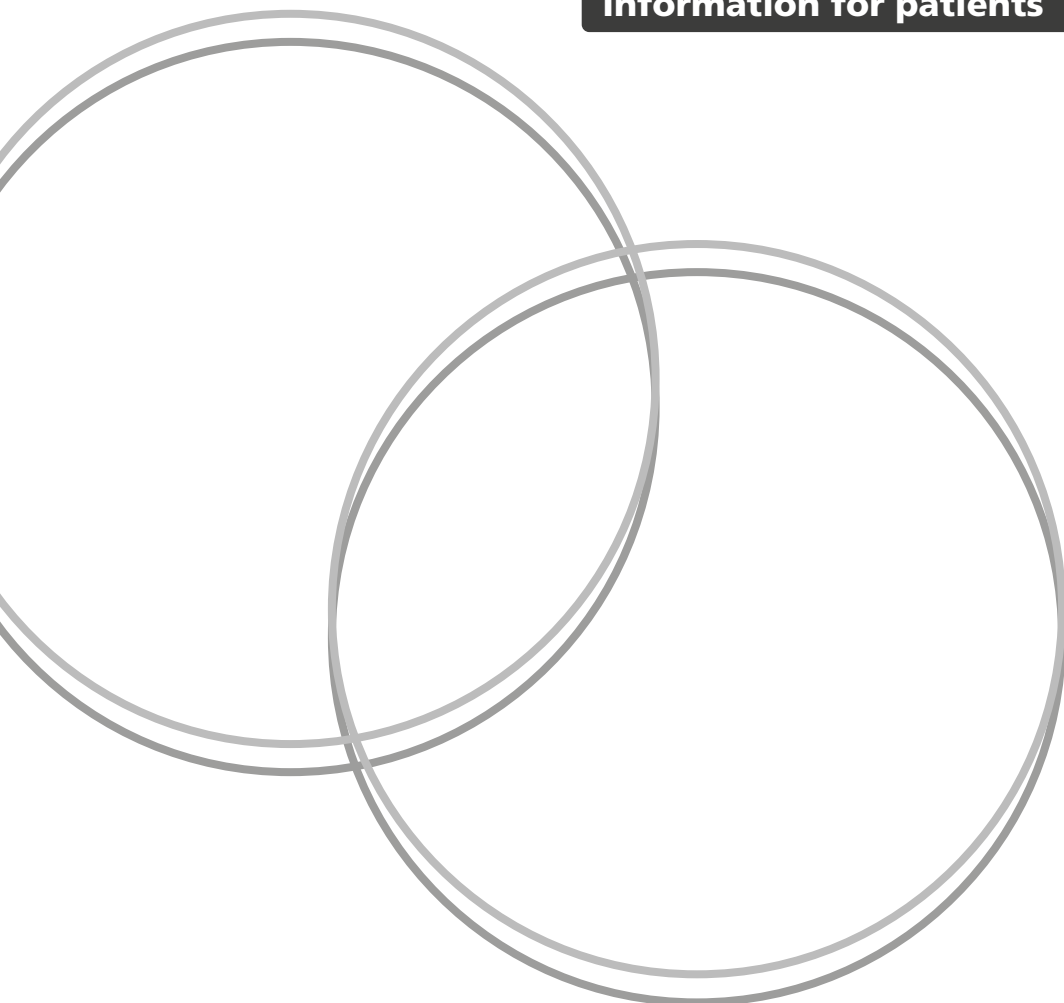


# Levonorgestrel Intrauterine System (LNG-IUS or Hormonal Coil)

**Information for patients**



## Contents

What is an intrauterine system?	3
How does it work?	4
If you are close to the menopause	4
Would an IUS be suitable for me?	5
Can an IUS be fitted at the time of caesarean section or immediately after delivery?	6
Are there any side effects?	6
Are there any risks?	7
Preparing for the IUS fitting	8
How is the IUS fitted?	9
After the fitting	10
Can I have the IUS removed?	12
IUS for heavy periods, problem bleeding, pain, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)	13
Contact	14

## What is an intrauterine system?

An intrauterine system (or IUS) is a very effective, safe and long- term form of contraception, which is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

The IUS works as contraception for 3 to 10 years, depending on which type of device is fitted and your age at the time of fitting. It can be removed earlier if required and you would immediately return to your original level of natural fertility.

The IUS is a T-shaped plastic device which contains levonorgestrel; a hormone similar to progesterone. It is fitted in the womb and has two soft threads attached to the end. These threads hang through the cervix into the top of the vagina. This makes it possible for us to remove it easily, if needed. The threads tuck out of the way, so shouldn't interfere with sex.

It is still possible to use tampons or a menstrual cup if you have an IUS fitted. Information about how to use a menstrual cup with an IUS is on our website. See link at the end of the leaflet.



Please note that the IUS does not offer any protection against sexually transmitted infections.

## How does it work?

The IUS continuously releases a low dose of levonorgestrel, which works by:

- thickening the mucus at the entrance to the womb, which stops sperm from reaching the egg
- thinning the endometrium (lining of the womb), which prevents an egg from implanting
- sometimes stopping the release of an egg (ovulation).

After the IUS has been inserted, it takes up to 7 days to start working effectively. You will need to use additional contraception (such as condoms) or avoid having sex for 7 days after having the IUS fitted.

It can be fitted at any time during your menstrual cycle, providing there is no possibility that you may be pregnant. It can also be fitted immediately after a miscarriage or abortion under 24 weeks of pregnancy.

## If you are close to the menopause

If your IUS was fitted at or after the age of 45, it can be relied upon for contraception until you reach the menopause. However, as the IUS may stop your periods it can be difficult to tell when the menopause has started.

If you are 50 or over and want to have the IUS removed you will be able to find out whether you have reached the menopause by discussing your medical history with your GP or specialist and having a blood test. If the blood test confirms you have reached the menopause we can then plan to remove the IUS.

Alternatively, you can choose to keep the IUS in place and then come to discuss removal when you reach the age of 55. There is a 96% chance that you will have reached your menopause by the age of 55.

## **Would an IUS be suitable for me?**

### **The IUS is suitable:**

- for most people, even if you have never been pregnant
- if you want a reliable method of contraception
- if you want to have a form of contraception which lasts a long time, but is not permanent, and for which you do not have to remember to take or use anything every day or before having sex
- if you have heavy, painful or troublesome periods, as it can reduce or stop bleeding altogether
- for 5 years, as the progestogenic part of HRT (hormone replacement therapy)
- as a treatment for some gynaecological conditions.

### **The IUS is not suitable if:**

- you do not want to use hormonal contraception
- you like to have regular periods
- there is a chance you might be pregnant
- you have an untreated sexually transmitted infection
- you are having unexplained vaginal bleeding.

Certain medical conditions will mean we need to discuss the suitability of an IUS with you in a specialist clinic.

## **Can an IUS be fitted at the time of caesarean section or immediately after delivery?**

- It is sometimes possible to have an IUS fitted immediately after delivering a baby. If you are pregnant and this is something you would like to consider, please speak with your midwife or obstetrician as soon as possible.
- If you would like to have your IUS fitted after you have delivered then you can contact Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service or your GP at any time during or after your pregnancy to discuss and plan this (see contact details below for Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service).

## **Are there any side effects?**

Most of the hormone from the IUS remains in the womb. A very small amount will be released into the rest of the body. You may experience side-effects from this, including:

- irregular bleeding for up to 6 months following fitting of the device. However, most find they have lighter bleeding or no bleeding at all once the IUS has settled down
- changes in mood
- weight loss or gain
- changes to your skin
- hair loss
- changes to sex drive (libido)
- breast tenderness
- headaches.

If you experience any unwanted side effects after having the IUS fitted, our advice would be to wait for 3 to 6 months, as they often settle down by this time.

## Are there any risks?

- There is a small chance of developing an infection most commonly during the first 20 days after an IUS is fitted.
- 1 in 20 IUS fall out or are pushed out by the womb. This occurs more commonly within the first few weeks of fitting.
- If you were to become pregnant while fitted with an IUS, there is a risk that the pregnancy will be ectopic. This is when the fertilised egg is implanted outside of the womb, usually in the fallopian tubes. However, the overall risk of an ectopic pregnancy is lower when using an IUS than when using no contraception at all.
- You may have some discomfort from the IUS. If so, we will firstly rule out other causes of this, such as infection. We may use an ultrasound scan to confirm that the IUS is sitting in the correct position.
- There is a 1:100 chance that you will experience lost threads. The following are possible causes of lost threads:
  - It is most likely that the threads have simply been drawn up into the cervical canal. Even if the threads can't be seen in your vagina, the IUS will still usually be in the right place within your womb and working properly. A doctor or nurse will be able to get them back down when it is time to remove the IUS.
  - Very rarely lost threads will mean that the IUS has fallen out unnoticed.
  - Rarely, (about 1 to 2 in 1,000 chance) an IUS goes through the wall of the womb into the abdomen. This is called 'perforation'. If this happened you would need surgery to remove it.

If you are unable to feel your threads, or you are worried your IUS has fallen out, it is important to avoid having sex or use alternative contraception, such as condoms.

Please seek medical advice from your GP or a nurse or doctor at a Sexual Health Service clinic as soon as possible. You may need to use emergency contraception if you have had sexual intercourse before discovering your IUS has fallen out.

The IUS, like other progestogen-containing contraceptives, causes a small increase risk in breast cancer. However, it protects against other cancers such as endometrial cancer.

## **Preparing for the IUS fitting**

Before we fit an IUS you will need to have a pre-fit consultation. We would do this even if you already have another type of device, such as a copper IUD, or are having your current IUS replaced. The pre-fit consultation may be face to face or over the telephone.

During this consultation you will receive more information about the IUS and will have a chance to ask any questions you might have. You will also be asked about your medical history.

Everyone planning to have an IUS fitted is offered a screen for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) before or at the time of the fitting. The reason we do this is because you could have infection, but it is causing no symptoms. When the IUS is fitted in the womb, the infection may be taken from the cervix up into the womb, where it can cause inflammation, pain and bleeding.

Anyone who is or has been sexually active may be at risk of having an STI. The chance of this varies depending on factors such as age and sexual history. You are at a higher risk if:

- you are under 25
- you have had sexual intercourse with more than one partner
- you have had a recent change of sexual partner
- your current or recent sexual partners have recently had other sexual partners.

We recommend that you do the screening test even if your risk of infection is very low.

Infection can be treated with antibiotics.



## **To ensure fitting can go ahead**

**Do not have sex from the first day of your period until the fitting, unless you are using the contraceptive pill, patch or injection reliably.**

- **Do not rely on condoms.**
- If you are not using reliable contraception and are not having regular periods, **please do not have sex for 3 weeks** before the fitting. You may need to bring an early morning urine sample to your appointment, in case a pregnancy test is necessary.
- If you are having your **current IUS removed and replaced**, avoid sex for 7 days before your appointment.

## **How is the IUS fitted?**

### **On the day of your appointment**

- Allow at least 90 minutes for your appointment. Whilst it is likely that you will be able to leave shortly after the fitting, we may ask you to stay for a short while if you feel lightheaded.
- Take a painkiller, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, about an hour before your appointment. Take whatever you normally use.
- Have breakfast and lunch as usual on the day of your appointment.
- Occasionally, you may have abdominal pain and feel lightheaded following an IUS fitting. While this is not dangerous or serious, if it does happen a friend or family member should ideally accompany you home. You will need to avoid driving immediately after the fitting. If you do come unaccompanied, please arrange that someone can be called to collect you, just in case this happens. Alternatively, you can arrange to be taken home by taxi.
- There is room for a pram in the clinic, but we don't have childcare facilities. If you need to bring children with you, please make sure you have someone with you to supervise them. You will not be able to do this yourself during the procedure.

## **During the fitting process:**

A care support worker or nurse will be present during the procedure, to support you and make sure you are comfortable.

You will be asked to undress your lower half and then lie on the bed in the clinic room. The doctor or nurse fitting your IUS will use a device called a speculum to be able to see your cervix. They will measure the length of your womb and then fit the IUS.

The procedure can be uncomfortable and may be painful. We can give you some local anaesthetic in the form of a numbing gel in your cervix and womb. This is put in place with an applicator, not as an injection. Occasionally, if this is not enough to relieve any discomfort, we may also offer you a local anaesthetic injection into your cervix.

The actual fitting procedure normally takes about 5 to 10 minutes.

Following the fitting, we will ask you to wait for 10 to 15 minutes before leaving the premises. Please let us know if you feel faint or lightheaded at any time.

## **After the fitting**

During the first few days after having the IUS fitted you may experience cramps, similar to period pain, and spotting. This will usually settle. If the pain is severe, becomes worse, or does not settle after 3 days you should contact your GP or nearest Sexual Health Service clinic.

A good way of checking your IUS is in the right place is by gently feeling for the threads. You will be given advice about doing this when the IUS is fitted. If you are not comfortable self-checking, or when you try you are unable to feel your threads, we will offer you a follow-up appointment. We can then check for you that your IUS is in the correct place.

If you are happy with your IUS, and you are confident that you can feel the threads, then a follow-up appointment is not necessary.

If at any time you have any concerns about your IUS, please make an appointment without delay. Use condoms or avoid sex until the appointment.

Occasionally your partner may be aware of the threads during intercourse. If this happens, you can make an appointment with your GP or Sexual Health Service clinic and the threads can be trimmed.

You should contact your GP or local Sexual Health Service clinic if any of the following arise:

- you are having any problems with the IUS
- you have any signs of infection, such as smelly discharge, lower abdominal – during sexual intercourse, high temperature or you develop new irregular bleeding
- you want your IUS to be removed
- you are worried you could be pregnant
- you have done a home pregnancy test which is positive and you have an IUS in place
- you are worried your IUS may not be in the right place or has fallen out. Use extra protection or avoid sex until your appointment. If you think you may have had sex since the IUS moved, you may need emergency contraception. Please seek advice as soon as possible.

## Can I have the IUS removed?

### You may need to have your IUS removed:

- to become pregnant
- because you have reached the date when its licence for use ends and a new one may be required
- because you are having problems with it
- because you are postmenopausal.

If you want to become pregnant, we recommend you prepare for this in advance. This includes starting to take folic acid at least three months before you start trying for a baby.

If you have a medical condition requiring regular treatment or medical supervision, it is important to continue with contraception until you have seen your GP or specialist. Together you can agree a safe medical plan for your pregnancy. Don't stop taking your regular medication without consulting your doctor.

Your natural fertility will return immediately after the IUS is removed, so you could become pregnant straight away.

The following website gives useful information about planning a pregnancy:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/planning-pregnancy](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/planning-pregnancy)

If you are not planning on becoming pregnant or are having the IUS replaced, you will need to avoid having sex in the 7 days before you come in for removal or fitting of a replacement IUS.

# **IUS for heavy periods, problem bleeding, pain, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)**

## **Heavy periods or problem bleeding**

The IUS is an effective treatment for heavy periods. It reduces monthly bleeding and can sometimes stop it altogether. If you are experiencing heavy periods and think that an IUS might be suitable for you please discuss with your GP.

If you are having a procedure such as a hysteroscopy to investigate heavy or problematic bleeding you may be offered an IUS at that time. Please read this leaflet before your procedure so you can decide whether this is something you want.

## **Pain with periods**

An IUS reduces pain with periods.

## **Pain from endometriosis and adenomyosis**

The IUS is a treatment for pain caused by endometriosis or adenomyosis. You may be advised by your GP or specialist about this.

**Please note, an IUS can remain in place for as long as it is effective to treat these problems and also remains effective as contraception for up to 8 years (or longer if placed from age 45 or above). You may find however, that it requires replacement early because your symptoms are returning. Please contact your GP for further advice and care.**

## **Hormone Replacement Therapy**

An IUS can be used to provide the progestogen part of HRT for up to 5 years. If you are using your IUS for HRT as well as contraception the IUS should be replaced or alternative progestogen used at 5 years even if you continue to use the IUS for contraception. Please see your GP or menopause specialist for further advice.

**Note: all devices should be removed when no longer needed.**

# **Website and telephone contact for Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service**

## **Home page**

Welcome to Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service  
- Sexual Health Oxfordshire

Website: [www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk](http://www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk)

## **Information about IUD/IUS and using a moon cup with an IUD or IUS**

Coils / IUD / IUS - Sexual Health Oxfordshire

Website: [www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/contraception/coils-iud-ius](http://www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/contraception/coils-iud-ius)

## **Online registration**

Personal Health Record

Website: [www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/phr/](http://www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/phr/)

## **Contact number**

Telephone: 01865 231 231



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Authors: A. Forsythe, J. Shefras  
July 2024  
Review: July 2027  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



*Making a difference across our hospitals*

[charity@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@ouh.nhs.uk) | 01865 743 444 | [hospitalcharity.co.uk](http://hospitalcharity.co.uk)

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

