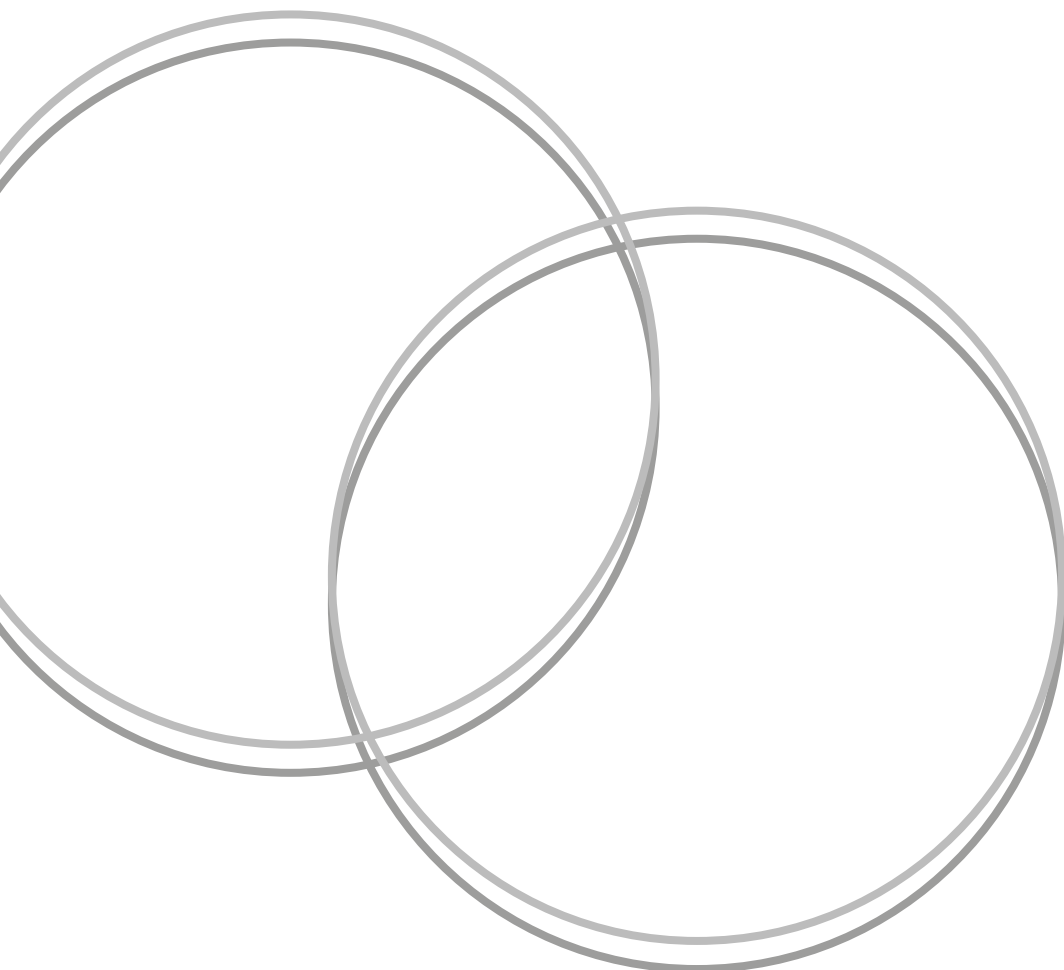


Copper Intrauterine Device (Copper IUD)

Information for patients



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What is an intrauterine device?

A copper intrauterine device (IUD) is a very effective, safe and long-term form of contraception, which is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

The copper IUD works as contraception for 5 to 10 years or more, depending on which type 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.

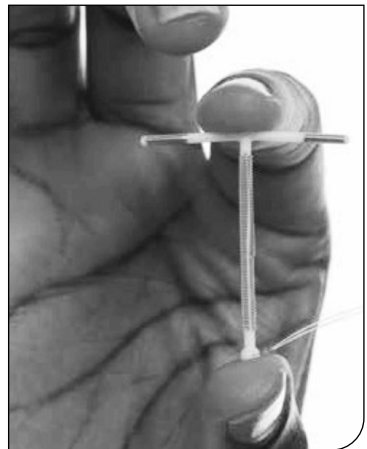
A copper IUD is a T-shaped plastic device which has sections coated by a type of metal called copper. IUDs used to be called 'coils'.

A copper IUD is non-hormonal (doesn't contain hormones). It is fitted in the womb and has one or 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 IUD fitted. Information about how to use a menstrual cup with an IUD is on our website. See link at the end of the leaflet.

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

There are different types of copper IUDs. The picture shows a T safe 380, the most commonly used type of copper IUD in those who have had children. Smaller versions may be used, for instance in those who have not had children.



How does it work?

The copper IUD works immediately after it has been fitted. The copper in the IUD stops sperm from surviving in the cervix or womb. This means that sperm are unable to travel to fertilise an egg in the fallopian tubes.

Rarely, sperm survives the presence of copper and reaches the egg. If this happens, the presence of the IUD in the womb may also work by stopping a fertilised egg from implanting.

The copper IUD can be fitted at any time during your menstrual cycle, as long as there is no possibility you could 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 IUD was fitted at or after the age of 40, it can be relied upon for contraception until you reach the menopause. It is recommended that you have your IUD removed after you have reached the menopause. It should be removed:

- 2 years after your periods have stopped, if this happens before you turn 50
- 1 year after your periods have stopped, if this happens when or after you turn 50.

Would an IUD be suitable for me?

The copper IUD is suitable:

- even if you have never been pregnant
- if you want a reliable form of contraception, but want to avoid hormones (perhaps because of side effects you have had with other hormonal contraceptive methods, or perhaps because of certain medical conditions)
- 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 had unprotected sex and need 'after-sex' contraception. This is also called 'post-coital' or 'emergency' contraception. A post-coital copper IUD also known as an emergency IUD is a very reliable way of preventing an unwanted pregnancy and then providing on-going contraception.

If used as emergency contraception, fewer than 1 in 100 users will fall pregnant. It is much more effective than taking emergency hormonal contraception (EHC – also known as the 'morning after' pill). 1 to 3 in every 100 users who take emergency hormone contraception will still fall pregnant.

Even if the copper IUD is not suitable in the long term, it is still very good for emergency contraception and can be removed once it has had its effect.

The copper IUD has no effect on when your period occurs. Your periods should come at their normal time. It has no effect on your hormones.

A copper IUD is not suitable if:

- there is a chance you might be pregnant
- you have an untreated sexually transmitted infection
- your womb is a different shape to normal (some wombs are a different shape from birth or the shape may have been changed with surgery)
- you have unexplained vaginal bleeding
- you have very heavy and/or painful periods.

Can a copper IUD be fitted at the time of caesarean section or immediately after delivery?

- It is sometimes possible to have a copper IUD 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 copper IUD 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 on page 14).

Are there any side effects?

- Your periods may become heavier, longer or more painful with a copper IUD. However, this change can be only very slight and commonly you don't notice the slight increase in blood loss. If it is a problem, you may want to change to another type of device called an intrauterine system (IUS).

Are there any risks?

- There is a small chance of developing an infection most commonly during the first 20 days after an IUD is fitted.
- 1 in 20 IUDs fall out or are pushed out by the womb. This occurs more commonly within the first few weeks of fitting. If this happens, we can offer you a different-shaped IUD, which may be better at remaining in place.
- If you were to become pregnant while fitted with an IUD, 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 IUD than when using no contraception at all.
- You may have some discomfort from the IUD. If so, we will firstly rule out other causes of this, such as infection. We may also use an ultrasound scan to confirm that the IUD 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 IUD 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 IUD.
 - Very rarely lost threads will mean that the IUD has fallen out unnoticed.
 - Rarely, (about a 1 to 2 in 1,000 chance) an IUD 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 IUD has fallen out, it is important to avoid 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 IUD has fallen out.

Preparing for the IUD fitting

Before we fit a copper IUD you need to have a pre-fit consultation. We would also do this if you already have another type of IUD and are changing to a copper IUD, or are having your current copper IUD removed and replaced. The pre-fit consultation may be face to face or over the telephone.

During this consultation you will receive more information about the different IUDs and you 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 IUD fitted is offered a screen for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) before or at the time of fitting. The reason we do this is because you could have an infection, but it is causing no symptoms. When the IUD 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 sexually transmitted infection (STIs). The chance of this varies depending on factors such as age and sexual history. You are at a higher risk of having an STI 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 IUD removed and replaced**, avoid sex for 7 days before your appointment.

How is the IUD 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 your breakfast and lunch as usual on the day of your appointment.
- Occasionally, you may have abdominal pain and feel lightheaded following an IUD 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 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 IUD 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 IUD.

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 IUD 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 IUD is in the right place is by gently feeling for the threads. You will be given advice about doing this when the IUD 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 IUD is in the correct place.

If you are happy with your IUD, 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 IUD, please contact the Sexual Health Service clinic to 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, make an appointment with The Sexual Health Service or GP 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 IUD
- you have any signs of infection, such as smelly discharge, lower abdominal pain, pain during sexual intercourse, high temperature or you develop irregular bleeding
- you want your IUD to be removed
- you are worried you could be pregnant
- you have carried out a home pregnancy test which is positive and you have an IUD in place
- you are worried your IUD 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 IUD moved, you may need emergency contraception. Please seek advice as soon as possible.

Can I have the IUD removed?

You may need to have your IUD 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 IUD 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

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

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

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

Online registration

Personal Health Record

Website: 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.

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