

HEALTH MATTERS

The Single-Rod Contraceptive Implant

What is the single-rod contraceptive implant?

The single-rod contraceptive implant is a type of birth control. The implant is a small tube made of plastic about the size of a matchstick. It contains a hormone called **etonogestrel** (et-oh-no-JES-trel) that prevents users from getting pregnant. In the United States, the single-rod implant often goes by its brand name, *Implanon*[®].

How safe and effective is the single-rod implant?

The World Health Organization has said that implants are one of the safest and most effective forms of birth control available. Even though the single-rod implant is new to the United States, more than 60 million women in the world have used similar implants. One of the main reasons the single-rod implant works so well is because users don't have to remember to do something about their birth control every day or every time they have sex.

How does the single-rod implant work?

After the implant is placed in your upper arm, it will slowly release the hormone into your body. This hormone does several things to keep users from getting pregnant:

- It stops eggs from leaving the ovaries.
- It makes the mucus around the cervix thick. This keeps sperm from getting to the egg.
- It makes the lining of the uterus thin. This keeps an egg from attaching to the uterus.

What are the benefits of using the single-rod implant?

- You do not have to think about your birth control every day or every time you have sex.
- Once it is inserted, it works for 3 years.
- If you want to stop using it, it can be removed at any time.
- You can use it if you are breast-feeding.
- It does not contain estrogen, a hormone that some women can't use in birth control.

What are the downsides of using the single-rod implant?

Like all medicines, the implant can have some side effects. For example, women who use the single-rod implant may have:

- irregular bleeding
- heavy and/or longer periods
- periods that are lighter and occur less often
- no periods at all

These changes do NOT mean that something is wrong. While using the implant, if your period stops, it does not necessarily mean that you are pregnant. Rarely, other side effects may occur. Talk about these with your health care provider so you know what to expect and what to do if they occur.

The single-rod implant does NOT protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Use a condom to protect you from STIs.

Who should NOT use the single-rod implant?

Do NOT use the single-rod implant if you:

- are pregnant or think you could be pregnant
- have vaginal bleeding that's not related to your period
- have liver disease
- have or had breast cancer
- are allergic to etonogestrel

Women who have blood clots now or have had them in the past, or who have a family history of blood clots, should talk to their health care provider before using the single-rod implant.

Tell your health care provider about ALL the medicines you take. Some medicines may interfere with the hormone in the single-rod implant. Your health care provider will review all of your medicines and other risks with you before you choose this birth control method.

Where can I get the single-rod implant?

Only trained health care providers (including doctors, nurses, and nurse midwives) can insert or remove the single-rod implant. If your health care provider isn't trained to insert an implant, ask for a referral to someone who is trained.

How is the single-rod implant inserted?

The implant is inserted underneath the skin of your arm. It takes less than 1 minute to insert the implant. Your health care provider will numb your skin, then use a thin applicator to insert the implant under your skin. The small puncture where it's inserted is covered with a bandage and will heal in a few days. After the implant is in place, you will be able to feel it but not see it. ***Make sure you can feel the implant in your arm before you leave your health care provider's office.***

Can I get the single-rod implant at any time?

The timing for putting in the implant is very important. Tell your health care provider when you had your last period.

Before the implant is inserted, you may have to take a pregnancy test. After it's inserted, you should use a backup method of birth control for 7 days. This will prevent you from getting pregnant while your body adjusts to the implant.

What if I want to stop using the single-rod implant?

You can use the implant for 3 years before having it removed. But, if you want to become pregnant or switch to another type of birth control, you can do so at any time. You can make an appointment with a health care provider to have it removed. Removal takes about 3 minutes.

Once the implant is taken out, you should be able to get pregnant right away. If you don't want to become pregnant after the implant is removed, you will have to start using another type of birth control for 7 days BEFORE it is removed.

Can I keep using the single-rod implant after 3 years?

The single-rod implant must be removed after 3 years because the hormone supply will run out. If you want to keep using this method, you can have another implant inserted when the old implant is removed.

Can I use the single-rod implant when I am breast-feeding?

Yes, you can use the implant while breast-feeding if 4 weeks have passed since you had your baby. A small amount of the hormone gets into your breast milk, but it will not harm your baby.

Are there any risks from the procedure I need to know about?

You may feel pain, soreness, or have swelling or bruising where the implant was placed. You also may have a small scar at the insertion site. Although it is rare, infection is possible.

Very rarely, there are difficulties with the implant. It can be inserted the wrong way or can break, which makes it hard to remove. The implant may move under the skin, which also makes it difficult to remove. You may be asked to have an X-ray to see the implant.

Where can I get more information?

You can learn more about the single-rod implant and other birth control options at ARHP's Contraception Resource Center (www.arhp.org/contraception) or by asking your health care provider.