

February 27, 2019

CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS - Pros & Cons



Written By: Dr. Neha S Ramjuttun

Family planning is important in every couple's life. In general, family planning benefits in various ways such as preventing any pregnancy-related health risks, preventing HIV/AIDS, improving maternal and child health, decreasing child mortality, enhancing education, empowering people, decreasing adolescent pregnancies, and slowing population growth. There are also many benefits that exist to each member of the family that is involved during family planning such as: mother - recovers quickly and more time is given to her baby, family, and own personal development; father - less responsibility in providing support to the family and more time is given to the family and own personal development; baby - becomes healthy and strong; and eventually more resources are available for the family.

Many different contraceptive methods have been used worldwide and each method has its own advantages and disadvantages. Contraceptive methods are divided into six categories. These include barrier methods, hormonal contraceptives, intrauterine contraception, natural family planning, sterilization, and emergency contraception.

Barrier methods include condoms, diaphragm, spermicides, and cervical cap. Condom is the most common barrier contraceptive method used and it is the only contraceptive method that protects from sexually transmitted infections. Spermicides are cheap but have an increase risk

of transmitting HIV infection and causing urinary tract infection. Cervical cap can be left in place for 24-48 hours but can cause urinary tract infection. Diaphragms also cause urinary tract infection. Allergic reactions can occur with any barrier methods.

Hormonal contraceptives include combined modalities and progestin-only modalities. Combined modalities include oral contraceptive pills, vaginal ring, and patch. Combined oral contraceptive pills (COCPs) are safe, easy, and effective. COCPs have many benefits such as decreasing the risks of cancers (ovarian cancer, endometrial cancer, and bowel cancer) and as well protecting from diseases such as ectopic pregnancy, pelvic inflammatory disease, anemia, and benign breast disease. It is also effective in reducing acne and menstrual cramps. COCPs may decrease the risks of ovarian and endometrial cancers but alternatively it can increase the risk of cervical cancer. The side effects of COCPs include headache, nausea, weight gain, tender breast, and unexpected bleed (spotting). Vaginal ring has similar benefits as COCPs such as decreasing menstrual cramps and acne and also decreasing cancer risks but its limitation is increased risk of blood clots. The side effects of vaginal ring are similar to that of COCPs. The patch has similar benefits and limitations to both, COCPs and vaginal ring. Progestin-only modalities can be in various forms such as injectable (Depo-Provera), pill, or subcutaneous implant. Depo-Provera can cease menstruation while taking the injections but menses return after about a year once you stop taking injections. It has many side effects such as irregular bleeding, weight gain, prolonged time for fertility return, and decreased bone density.

Intrauterine contraception includes copper T and levonorgestrel. It is very effective. Copper T can last about 10 years whereas others last around 3- 5 years. Menstrual bleeding and pain may occur with copper T but not with levonorgestrel.

Natural family planning includes the basal body temperature method, calendar method, withdrawal, and cervical mucus method. These methods have no health risks and are inexpensive but require periods of abstinence.

Sterilization is the only permanent contraceptive method and it includes tubal ligation and vasectomy. These are safe and effective but can be expensive as a minor surgery is required.

Emergency contraception includes Copper T, ulipristal acetate pills, and progestin pills. The emergency contraceptives are effective up to 5 days.

What about postpartum contraception? Contraceptives are not needed for at least 3 weeks post-delivery. After 3 weeks if you are breastfeeding then other means of contraceptives can be deferred. If after 3 weeks you are not breastfeeding or once you have stopped breastfeeding, you must consider other contraceptives such as condoms, progestin-only pills, Depo-Provera, implants, COCPs, diaphragms, cervical caps, and IUD. Progestin-only pills are safe to use during lactation and it does not decrease the milk production.

Family planning is important and there are varieties of options available for contraception.

Choose the best method effectively by weighing its advantages and disadvantages and seek advice when in doubt.

References:

1. <http://wikiprogress.org/articles/archive/family-planning/>
2. <https://youngwomenshealth.org/2009/01/28/pros-and-cons-contraceptive-methods/>