

(This article is the health feature for the June 2013 issue of *Pregnancy & Newborn* magazine, and will be on stands in late May.)

Healthy Mama
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[head] Birth control after baby

[deck] Everything you need to know about postpartum contraception.

With a new baby in the house, getting pregnant again is probably the last thing on your mind. But you and your partner can return to intimacy around 6 weeks after you give birth, and you may find that your previous birth control method of choice isn't right for your new lifestyle.

[subhead] Sooner than you think

After giving birth, your uterus returns to its normal cycle, meaning that you can get pregnant again within a month. (Remember Tori Spelling's fourth baby?) The average length of time between giving birth and ovulating is 45 days, but some women can ovulate again in as few as 25 days. "Many women think they can't get pregnant again until after they've had their first post-pregnancy period, but the fact is by that point, she's already ovulated," says Dr. Aisha Redmond, OB/GYN, Healthcare Team Lead for Kaiser Permanente Town Park and Area Physician for the Southeastern Permanente Medical Group. "All it takes is once to get pregnant. You can absolutely conceive before you've had your first period."

Your new routine may not be conducive to your previous method of birth control; for example, taking an oral contraceptive at the same time every day might slip your mind when you haven't slept in days. "If you miss one pill, you're no longer protected from pregnancy," says Redmond. Instead, you may want to switch to condoms, which you can use when you're already focused on the deed, or an implant, which you can put in and promptly not give another thought. Alternatively, you may find that condoms are no longer comfortable and want to switch to something out of the way, like the patch. "It's just a matter of taking the time to find which method is right for you," says Redmond.

[subhead] Decisions, decisions

There are 10 basic types of temporary birth control: combination pills, extended pills, mini pills, the patch, implants, intrauterine devices (IUDs), injection, vaginal ring, diaphragm, and condom (permanent measures range from getting your "tubes tied" to removing your uterus). We know this list is long, but don't panic! There are a few simple questions to ask yourself that can help narrow down your options.

[subsubhead] Money matters

The first question to consider is how much money you're comfortable spending. For many women, cost has traditionally been a deciding factor, since several types of contraception are out of the average woman's budget. However,

Redmond says that's changing. "Because of recent health care reform, many insurance companies and Medicaid now cover various forms of birth control, from pills to injections. Check with your insurance or Medicaid provider for the list of newly supported types." The more costly items are usually the ones that last the longest. For example, the implant, a flexible rod that your doctor implants under your skin, can cost as much as \$900, but lasts for three years. IUDs, which your doctor will fit into your vagina, are much the same—the cost can range from \$500 to \$1000, but protection lasts for years. Though your care provider may not cover the full cost, you may be able to get a reduced rate.

[subsubhead] Milk it

Another important item to think about is whether or not you will breastfeed, as the hormones in some forms of contraception can have a negative impact on your milk or supply. "Generally, contraceptives with estrogen are not considered safe for breastfeeding mothers," says Redmond. "If you are breastfeeding, you'll want to choose either a non-hormonal form or one with progesterone only." Certain types of oral contraception, such as the mini pill, as well as implants and IUDs are safe for breastfeeding, but combination pills are out. And if you're not currently breastfeeding, don't worry about the hormones you're taking now making an impact in the future. "There's no buildup of the hormones [from birth control in your body]," says Redmond. "It's definitely safe for you to breastfeed in the future."

[subsubhead] Baby one more time

Finally, consider when you might want to get pregnant again in the future. Talk to your partner about a possible timeline for expanding your family. "Fertility usually returns about one to two months after removal of methods like IUDs," says Redmond, "but for oral contraceptives, I usually recommend switching to another form of birth control [such as condoms] about three to four months before you want to conceive. It's usually a similar timeline for the ring and the patch." Just make sure you know how long a method remains effective before you buy it – you wouldn't want to pay for a pricey three-year method only to remove it a few months later.

Make sure to do your research *before* you become sexually active again, ideally before you've had the baby. Yes, we know it seems ridiculous when you feel about as sexy as a baked potato, but you're much better off deciding now than when you're stressed and sleep-deprived with a newborn. Talk to your doctor during a regular pregnancy checkup about when you can start having sex again and which methods will be best for you. It will be one fewer thing to worry about later on, leaving you to devote all your time to your baby and partner.

[sidebar]

[head] Myths busted!

[deck] The truth about common post-pregnancy myths

Myth: Breastfeeding prevents pregnancy.

Busted: Nope. "You can still get pregnant even if you're breastfeeding!" emphasizes Redmond. "Using it as a birth control doesn't work."

Myth: I can't afford birth control.

Busted: You may not have to—many insurance providers now cover the cost.

Myth: Taking birth control now can affect my ability to have children later.

Busted: Most methods of birth control allow for the return of fertility quickly, meaning you'll still be able to expand your family down the road.

[box] The major factors

[deck] Questions to ask yourself when choosing a method of contraception

- What is the cost?
- Will I be breastfeeding?
- How quickly will I want to get pregnant again?

[Good to know] The hormones in your birth control only affect your breast milk while you're taking it—there's no buildup to affect later milk production.

[blurb] Talk to your partner about if and when you want to conceive again before choosing a method of birth control.

[Tip] Some methods of contraception can cause spotting during the first few months, so have protection on hand before using them.