

Copper intra-uterine device (IUD)



	Page
What is an inter-uterine device?	3
How does it work?	4
Would an IUD be suitable for me?	5
Are there any risks or complications?	6
Preparing for the IUD fitting	8
How is the IUD fitted?	9
After the fitting	10
Can I have the IUD removed?	12
Insertion and post-fit appointment booking forms	13

What is an intra-uterine device?

A copper intra-uterine 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 5-10 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.

An intra-uterine device is a T-shaped plastic device which has sections coated by a type of metal called copper. IUDs used to be called a 'coil'.

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 means it is possible for us to remove it easily, if needed. The threads tuck out of the way and won't interfere with sexual intercourse. Please note that the copper IUD does not offer any protection against sexually transmitted infections.

It is still possible to use tampons or a menstrual cup if you have an IUD fitted.

There are different types of copper IUDs. The picture shows a T safe 380, the most commonly used type of copper IUD in women who have had children. The mini TT 380 or Nova T380 are smaller versions usually used in women who have not had children or who may have a smaller womb than average.

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 the sperm is 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.

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

If you have recently given birth it is best to wait for 1 month before having an IUD fitted.

For women close to the menopause

If your IUD was fitted 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 at or after you turned 50.

Would an IUD be suitable for me?

The copper IUD is suitable:

- for most women, including those who 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 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 women will fall pregnant. It is much more effective than taking emergency hormonal contraception (EHC – also known as the ‘morning after’ pill). 1-3 in every 100 women that 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 (at 7 days or more from the episode of unprotected sex).

The copper IUD has no effect on when your period occurs. Your periods should come at their normal time. It has no effects 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 women are born with a different-shaped womb or may have had surgery to their womb which changed its shape)
- you have unexplained vaginal bleeding
- you have very heavy and/or painful periods.

Are there any risks or complications?

- Your periods may become heavier, longer or more painful with a copper IUD. However, this change can be only very slight and most women find that they don't notice the slight increase in blood loss. If this is a problem we may suggest that you change to another type of device called an Intra Uterine System (IUS).
- There is a small chance of infection during the first 20 days after an IUD is fitted. This may occur when bacteria which are normally found in the vagina (where they have no harmful effects) are pushed up into the womb during the fitting process. They can then cause inflammation and other symptoms of an infection. If a sexually transmitted infection (such as chlamydia) is present in the vagina this can also be pushed up into the womb.
- 1 in 20 IUDs can fall out or be pushed out by the womb. This occurs more commonly within the first few weeks of fitting or during a period. If this happens, we may recommend that you are fitted with 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 very small risk that the pregnancy will be ectopic. This is when the egg is implanted outside of the womb, usually in the fallopian tubes. However, the overall risk of an ectopic pregnancy is less in women using an IUD than in women using no contraception at all.
- An IUD may occasionally cause symptoms such as discomfort throughout your monthly cycle or when having sexual intercourse. If you are having these symptoms we would firstly rule out other causes of pain, such as infection. If the IUD is otherwise working well for you, but is uncomfortable, we may be able to fit a smaller or differently shaped IUD.
- About 1 in 100 women experience lost threads. You may notice this if you try to check the threads and can't feel them,

or it might be noticed by your doctor/gynaecologist, during an internal examination, for example during a cervical cytology screen (smear) or at your 6 week check after the fitting. If we can't see the threads, we or your GP will organise an ultrasound scan to find out what has happened.

The following are possible causes of lost threads:

- o 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. We will easily be able to get them back down when it is time to remove the IUD.
- o Very occasionally lost threads will mean that the IUD has fallen out unnoticed.
- o Rarely, (about 1 in 1000 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 abstain from sex or use alternative contraception such as condoms. Please seek medical advice from your GP or a nurse or doctor at the 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 an existing 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 may have. You will also be asked about your medical background.

All women planning to have an IUD fitted are offered a screen for chlamydia infection before or at the time of fitting. The reason we do this is that you could have chlamydia but it is causing no symptoms. During placement of the IUD in the womb, the chlamydia infection may be taken from the cervix, where it is causing no symptoms, 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 chlamydia. The chance of this varies according to factors such as age and sexual history. You are at a higher risk of having chlamydia 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.

It is your choice whether to take up the offer of a chlamydia test, but we do highly recommend that you have it done, even if you don't feel that you are likely to have chlamydia.

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 **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 **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. While 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, women have abdominal pain and feel lightheaded following an IUD fitting. While this is not dangerous or serious, if this 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 for someone to be available for us to contact 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 that you have someone with you to supervise them while they are in the waiting room. You will not be able to do this yourself during the procedure.

During the fitting process:

A health care assistant or nurse will be present during the procedure to support you and make sure that you are comfortable.

You will be asked to undress your lower half and to 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 give you a local anaesthetic injection into your cervix.

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

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

After the fitting

In 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, gets worse or does not settle after 3 days you should contact your GP or nearest Sexual Health Service clinic.

We do not recommend use of tampons or a menstrual cup in the first 28 days after having an IUD fitted.

If you feel comfortable, a good way of checking your IUD is in the right place is by gently feeling for the threads. Advice on how to do this will be given at the time of the fitting procedure. Not all women are comfortable self-checking; alternative ways of ensuring the IUD is still in place can also be discussed at your fitting appointment.

We will invite you to a follow-up appointment approximately 6 weeks after your fitting. It is important that you come to this appointment so that we can confirm the IUD is still correctly placed. This appointment is normally scheduled so that you will have had your first period with the IUD in place. The IUD will also have had a month (a whole cycle) to settle in. We will also ask you whether you have tried to self-check the threads of the IUD, and if so, whether you were successful. If you do not wish to check or cannot feel their threads, we will give you advice on what to look out for and how to be confident that the IUD remains correctly placed in the future.

Very occasionally, women report that their partner is aware of the threads during intercourse. The first follow-up appointment is a good time to raise this, as we can then trim the threads.

The appointment is also an opportunity to ask any further questions you might have about the IUD.

If you have any concerns following your fitting then seek medical advice before your routine follow-up appointment.

If all is well at your first follow-up you will need no further appointments. However, you should seek medical advice 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
- 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 do not have 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.

If you have concerns about your IUD at any time after the follow up appointment please seek medical advice from your GP or local Sexual Health Service clinic.

Can I have the IUD removed?

You may wish to have your IUD removed:

- to become pregnant
- because it is reaching its expiry date and a new one is required
- because you are having problems with it
- because you are postmenopausal.

If you want to become pregnant we recommend that you prepare for this in advance. This includes starting to take vitamin D supplements and folic acid at least 3 months before you start trying for a baby. Your natural fertility will return immediately after the IUD is removed, so you could become pregnant straight away.

If you are not planning on becoming pregnant or are having the IUD replaced, we will need you to avoid having sex in the 7 days before you come in for removal or fitting of a replacement IUD. This is to avoid the chance of you falling pregnant once the IUD has been removed, or in the uncommon event that we are unable to replace your removed IUD with a new one.

Insertion and post-fit appointment booking forms

Appointment details

Suitable for routine or training
 complex clinics non contraceptive clinic

IUD can be fitted any time from:

- now
 the following date/...../.....

Your appointment is on

...../...../.....

at:.....am/pm

It will be at the Oxford Sexual Health Service clinic at:

- Churchill Hospital, Oxford
 Rectory Road, East Oxford
 Oak Tree Health Centre, Didcot
 Windrush Medical Practice, Witney
 Orchard Health Centre, Banbury

If you have not received an appointment within 4 weeks of your pre-fit consultation please ring the IUD Service Administrator:

Tel: **01865 231 231**

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO KEEP YOUR APPOINTMENT PLEASE RING TO LET US KNOW. THIS ALLOWS US TO ALLOCATE THE TIME TO SOMEONE ELSE AND RE-SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT, IF YOU WISH.

Post-fitting details for your copper IUD

First follow-up at

..... weeks

Appointment date: .../.../.....

Appointment time::.....

OR drop in

- Your IUD is a
- It is licensed as a contraceptive method until:
...../...../.....
- Review as contraceptive method on:/...../.....

Your IUD will be effective as contraception immediately.

Useful information and websites:

Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service

Web: www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/

Family Planning Association

Website: www.fpa.org.uk/

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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