

The Contraceptive Injection

Depo Provera - long acting and reliable contraception

A service provided by

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals



NHS Foundation Trust

What is Depo Provera?

Depo Provera is a very effective long acting contraceptive injection that protects you from pregnancy for 12 weeks. It contains a type of hormone called progestogen. The injection is given into a muscle and is released very slowly into your body.

How does Depo Provera work?

Depo Provera works in three ways:

- It stops your ovaries releasing an egg every month.
- It thickens the mucus you produce from your cervix. This makes it more difficult for the sperm to get to the egg.
- It thins the lining of the womb, making it less likely that a fertilised egg will implant in the womb.

How effective is Depo Provera?

Depo Provera is an extremely effective method of contraception mainly because you only have to have an injection once every 12 weeks in order to be protected from pregnancy. It is over 99% effective.

Does anything make Depo Provera less effective?

If you have your injection late it may be less effective.

What are the advantages of Depo Provera?

- Each Depo Provera injection lasts for 12 weeks.
- It doesn't interfere with sex.
- It can be used if you are breast feeding.
- It may reduce heavy painful periods and help with premenstrual symptoms for some women.
- It is useful if you cannot take oestrogen (the hormone contained in the combined oral contraceptive).

What are the disadvantages of Depo Provera?

- Your periods may change in a way you find unacceptable.
- After stopping Depo Provera it can take several months for your periods and your fertility to return. Sometimes it can take one to two years for your fertility to return to normal.
- Depo Provera is associated with an increase in weight (an average of 3kg over 2 years). Healthy eating and regular exercise can help to reduce weight gain.
- Once you have the Depo Provera injection it will remain in your body for 12 weeks and cannot be removed – so if you have any side effects they may continue during this time and for some time afterwards.
- Studies are looking at whether using Depo Provera for a long time may reduce bone density and cause osteoporosis, so far the evidence suggests the risk is minimal.
- Research about the risk of breast cancer, cervical cancer and hormonal contraception is complex and contradictory. Research suggests that users of all hormonal contraception may have a small increase in risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to non-users.

Can anyone have Depo Provera?

Depo Provera is not suitable for every woman. Please tell the doctor or nurse about any illnesses that you have had.

The following conditions may mean that Depo Provera is not suitable for you:

- You think you may be pregnant or you want to become pregnant in the near future.
- You do not want your periods to change

You have now or have had in the past:

- Cancer of the reproductive organs, for example breast cancer or cancer of the womb.
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding (between your periods or after sex)
- A heart attack or stroke (serious arterial disease)
- Diabetes with complications
- Systemic Lupus Erythematosus
- Active liver disease
- Risk factors for osteoporosis (thinning of the bones)

How does Depo Provera affect my bones?

Using Depo Provera affects your natural oestrogen levels, which can cause thinning of the bones. This is not usually a problem for most women as the bone replaces itself when you stop the injection and it does not appear to cause long term problems. It does not appear to cause an increase in bone fracture. Young women (under 18) may use Depo Provera but only after careful evaluation by a doctor or nurse. This is because young women are still developing bone.

If you already have risk factors for osteoporosis it is normally advisable for you to use another method of contraception. Risk factors include:

- An early menopause
- Missing periods due to over exercising, extreme dieting or eating disorders
- Heavy smoking
- Heavy drinking
- Long term use of steroids
- Close family history of osteoporosis

Will Depo Provera affect my periods?

Your periods will probably change. At first bleeding can be irregular and may last for longer than usual. Often your periods will stop altogether, although it may take several months for this to occur. The changes to your periods can be a nuisance but they are not harmful. Please return to clinic for advice if you are experiencing prolonged bleeding. We will want to check that your bleeding is not due to another cause such as infection.

When can I start using Depo Provera?

Your first Depo Provera injection will usually be given during the first five days of your period and you will be protected from pregnancy immediately.

If you start the injection on any other day you will not be protected from pregnancy for the first seven days so you must use another method of contraception, for example condoms, during this time.

Where is the injection given?

The injection is given every 12 weeks and usually is injected into the muscle in your bottom. Occasionally you may be advised to have the injection in your upper arm.

How long can I use Depo Provera for?

You can continue to use Depo Provera until you are 50 as long as you have no medical reasons not to. You should have your risk factors for osteoporosis re-assessed every 2 years.

I have just had a baby when can I start Depo Provera?

Depo Provera is usually given six weeks after the birth although occasionally you may be recommended to have it earlier. If you have sex during those six weeks it is possible to become pregnant again and it is important to use another method of contraception such as condoms.

Can I use Depo Provera after a miscarriage or abortion?

Depo Provera can be given immediately after a miscarriage or abortion and will start working straight away

Does Depo Provera protect me from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

No, the injection only protects you from pregnancy. If you want to avoid STIs including chlamydia, gonorrhoea & HIV it is important to use condoms as well.

Condoms are available free from the Sexual Health Clinic.

Sexual Health Sheffield

Visit Sexual Health Sheffield's website for opening times

www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk

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