Depo-Provera

What is Depo-Provera?

Depo-Provera is a drug that prevents pregnancy for three months at a time. It is given by injection and is called “the shot”.

How does Depo-Provera work?

During the normal menstrual cycle, hormones cause the release of an egg from your ovaries. At the same time, the lining of your uterus, the endometrium, is getting ready for a fertilized egg. The endometrium becomes a thick cushion of tissue that nourishes the fertilized egg if you become pregnant. If you do not get pregnant, then the thick cushion of tissue is shed from the uterus through the vagina. The release of tissue and blood is known as menstruation.

Depo-Provera is similar to the natural hormone in your body called progesterone. It works by preventing egg release from your ovary. The lining of the uterus thins. It may shed a little bit at a time causing periods to be lighter and more irregular.

Depo-Provera is injected into the arm or buttock muscle, where it dissolves slowly and is released into your body over time. The drug’s contraceptive effects last for up to 3 months after the injection.

Who Should Use Depo-Provera?

- Depo-Provera is a good choice if you are seeking a safe, reliable, long-term, reversible form of birth control. It may be particularly good if you have had problems using the pill or barrier methods.
- If you are breastfeeding.
- If you can’t use birth control that contains estrogen.

Is it Effective?

Depo-Provera is a highly effective form of birth control. For every 100 women using Depo-Provera, less than 1 a year will get pregnant.

When am I Safe from Pregnancy?

You will need to use a back-up method such as condoms for one week after your first shot. If you received the shot during the first 5 days after the start of your last normal period you may not need to use a back-up method. Talk to your doctor or nurse.

Is it Safe?

Yes, Depo-Provera is safe. It was approved for use as a contraceptive and has been used by millions of women.
What are the Advantages of Depo-Provera?

- Only contains progesterone, and therefore, no possible estrogen-related side effects
- Light periods or no periods which results in less chance of anemia
- Decreased menstrual cramps and pain
- Less pain associated with ovulation
- Less risk of endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, and tubal pregnancy
- Less pain associated with endometriosis
- It’s reversible
- Long-term birth control
- No significant drug interactions
- Fewer seizures if you have epilepsy
- Decreased risk of sickle cell crisis

Are There Side Effects?

- Changes in bleeding.
  - Irregular bleeding and spotting: This is normal during the first few months and usually decreases over time.
  - No bleeding: After one year of use, at least 50% of women do not get their periods.
  - Heavier bleeding: If this lasts for more than a few days and does not go away, call your health care provider.
- Weight gain: Depo-Provera may cause an increase in appetite. Average weight gain is 5-7 pounds in the first year. Watching what you eat and exercising at least 3 times a week is helpful.
- Headaches.
- Breast soreness.
- PMS (premenstrual syndrome) may get better or worse.
- Depression.
- Anxiety or nervousness.
- Fatigue.
- Decreased interest in sexual activity (libido).

Call the clinic if you experience any of the following:

- Increased painful headaches
- Heavy or prolonged bleeding
- Yellowing of your skin or eyes
- New lumps in your breast
- Significant depression
- Severe abdominal pain
What can be done to help with irregular bleeding?

1. Time will help. The longer Depo-Provera is used, the more likely you are to have less bleeding or no bleeding at all.
2. Sometimes health care providers will give estrogen in the form of birth control pills, to help your cycle become more regular.
3. Medicines such as ibuprofen may help with menstrual bleeding.
4. If you notice your bleeding is occurring right before your next shot, you can get your shot as early as every 10 weeks.

Will Depo-Provera decrease my chance of getting pregnant in the future?

Depo-Provera does not have any permanent effects on your ability to conceive. It is normal to expect a 6-12 month delay in getting pregnant after stopping Depo-Provera use. Whether or not there is a delay in getting pregnant depends on many factors including your ability to get pregnant before you used Depo-Provera.

Does Depo-Provera protect against AIDS and STDS?

No, injectable contraceptives do not protect against HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, or sexually transmitted infections. You need to use latex condoms as well as Depo-Provera to protect against getting AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.

Are there any instructions for using Depo-Provera?

- See your health care provider every year for a physical exam.
- You must make a return visit every 11-13 weeks to get shots. After 13 weeks, a urine pregnancy test will be done to make sure you are not pregnant.
- If you are late for your injection use a back up method of contraception (i.e. condom). See your health care provider right away to get your shot.
- If taken late, use a back-up method of birth control for 14 days to prevent pregnancy and do a follow-up pregnancy test in a few weeks.
- If you have already had intercourse without being protected by a contraceptive, call your health care provider to discuss options including emergency contraception, which may help prevent a pregnancy.
- If you stop taking Depo-Provera and do not want to become pregnant, start using a new form of birth control 13 weeks after your last shot.
- Menstrual irregularities may continue until Depo-Provera is cleared from your body. This may be up to 6-8 months after your last shot.
- Your bones could become less dense with long-term use, therefore, it is important to make sure that you get enough calcium in your diet and do weight bearing activity (walking or running) at least three times a week.