



What you should know about Depo-Provera

What is Depo-Provera?

Depo-Provera is a shot that protects you against pregnancy for a full three months. It contains a chemical similar to (but not the same as) the natural hormone progesterone.

Depo-Provera must be prescribed by your health care provider.

How does it work?

Depo-Provera prevents your egg cells from ripening so they cannot become fertilized by sperm or result in pregnancy. Depo-Provera also causes changes in the lining of your uterus that make pregnancy less likely.

Benefits of Depo-Provera

- It does not contain estrogen, a hormone found in most oral contraceptives.
- It lasts three months – there is no daily pill to remember.
- It cannot be expelled from the body like an IUD.
- It is reversible. Most women can get pregnant within 12 to 18 months of stopping Depo-Provera.
- Nursing mothers can use it.
- It is private. There are no packets to keep track of and it cannot be seen or felt, like contraceptive implants.

What about Depo-Provera and bone thinning (osteopenia)?

Depo-Provera may cause mild bone thinning that gets worse the longer you use it. However,

when you stop using Depo-Provera, bone growth begins again.

We do not know whether bone mass comes back completely or if it increases your risk of broken bones later in life.

What can I do to protect my bones?

To protect your bones while taking Depo-Provera:

- Do regular weight bearing exercise, such as walking, and include extra Calcium in your diet or take Calcium and Vitamin D supplements. See Calcium handout for more information
- Do not use Depo-Provera for longer than 2 years in a row unless you cannot use other birth control methods. If you want to continue taking Depo-Provera longer than 2 years, discuss the risks and benefits with your clinician.
- Bone mineral density testing (BMD) is not effective in young women and is not usually recommended.

Who should not use Depo-Provera?

You should not use Depo-Provera if you:

- Are pregnant
- Have vaginal bleeding that cannot be explained
- Have had breast cancer
- Are taking medicine for Cushing's disease
- Have had recent liver disease like hepatitis, liver tumors or abnormal liver tests

Other side effects

Like most medications, Depo-Provera may have side effects. Many women who experience side effects during the first few months of using Depo-Provera find that these decrease over time

- After you start using Depo-Provera, your periods will be less regular. Occasional bleeding between periods is also common.
- If you use Depo-Provera for more than one year, your periods may stop completely. Periods return within 6-18 months after the shots have been stopped.
- Some women also have bloating/weight gain, headaches, depression, hair loss, or loss of interest in sex.
- Not all women who use Depo-Provera gain weight, but some gain several pounds during use. A low fat diet and regular exercise can help keep you fit.

Like most contraceptives, Depo-Provera does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases. Condoms should be used for this purpose.

What increases my risk of health problems when using Depo-Provera?

The higher your risk of heart disease, the more likely that you will have serious health problems while using Depo-Provera. Heart disease risks include:

- Being 35 or older
- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure
- High Cholesterol
- Diabetes

Tell your health care provider if you have any of these risks or any other medical problems that may apply for you.