

Choosing Birth Control When You're in the Military

Women in the military deal with unique circumstances that may affect their choice of birth control.



Here are some things to consider.

What are my birth control options during deployment?

Many servicewomen prefer the convenience of a non-daily form of birth control.

Long-acting reversible contraception (LARC), which includes intrauterine devices (IUDs) and the Nexplanon birth control implant, may be a good option for some women.

LARC methods:



Last between 3–12 years



Are over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy



Can be removed at any time



Are rapidly reversible

For women who don't want to use LARC but also don't want to have to take a pill every day, hormonal birth control options include:



Depo-Provera shot (given every 3 months)



Vaginal ring (changed every 3–4 weeks)



Patch (changed weekly)

If you're on the pill, ask your medical provider to prescribe a year's supply (13 packs or more, depending on how you take it) so you'll have enough to last through deployment.

What kind of birth control can help me stop or slow my period?

For deployed servicewomen, difficulty with hygiene can make **reducing or stopping periods** a major selling point when it comes to choosing contraception.

Reducing or stopping your period is possible with several types of hormonal birth control:



Depo-Provera shot

Many women **stop getting periods** after 6–12 months of use, but they may have unscheduled bleeding for the first 3–6 months.



birth control pills

Can make periods lighter and more predictable, or stop them entirely if you only take "active" pills (not placebo pills at the end of the pack).



hormonal IUD

Lightens periods after several months of use, and about **half of women will stop having periods** altogether for some types of IUDs.



vaginal ring

Can stop bleeding if worn for 4 weeks straight and then replaced (instead of removing after 3 weeks and going ring-free for a week).



How can I protect myself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

Latex and polyurethane **condoms** are the only method of birth control that protects against STIs.

How can birth control help with other health issues?

Some forms of hormonal birth control can be used for health **issues**, such as menstrual-associated headaches, painful menses, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and acne. **50% of all women on the pill** use it for more than just birth control.

How can I pay for birth control?

TRICARE, the insurance used by servicemembers and their families, covers the following types of birth control if prescribed by a TRICARE-authorized provider:

- Diaphragms
- IUDs
- Prescription contraceptives such as the pill, patch and ring
- Contraceptive implants (for pregnancy prevention only)
- Permanent contraception (surgical sterilization)

TRICARE also covers prescription emergency contraceptives, such as IUDs and ella. It also covers Plan B One-Step, which is available to all beneficiaries for free without a prescription.

TRICARE doesn't cover:

- Condoms
- Nonprescription spermicidal foams, jellies or sprays
- Nonhormonal vaginal gel (Phexxi)

NOTE:

Just because a birth control method is covered by TRICARE doesn't mean you can get it at every military treatment facility (MTF). The only two forms of birth control you can count on being **available at all MTFs** are the pill and emergency contraception.

If possible, check to see if your chosen form of contraception is available on your base or ship before you deploy.

Where can I go for guidance about my birth control options?

There's a lot of misinformation about birth control out there. If you're having difficulty getting your questions answered, check websites such as **Planned Parenthood (plannedparenthood.org)** and **Bedsider (bedsider.org)** for accurate information and help with things like:

What to do if you **miss a pill**

How to **stop your period** with the pill

Troubleshooting issues with your **IUD or implant**