



Withdrawal (“Pulling Out”)

What is Withdrawal?

Withdrawal, also known as “coitus interruptus,” is the removal of the penis from a partner’s vagina before ejaculation, or coming. Withdrawal may be the most common method of birth control since it’s free and always available to prevent contact between egg and sperm, reducing the possibility of pregnancy. While withdrawal has been criticized as a non-method, it is 73-96% effective for birth control, depending on the male partner’s self-knowledge and self-control. While 85 percent of heterosexual partners who leave birth control to chance are likely to become pregnant in a year, only 19 percent of partners who use withdrawal are. Withdrawal does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.

Where’s the sperm?

During sex, the penis releases two kinds of fluids. The first is pre-ejaculate or pre-cum, a lubricant made in a gland in the penis. This fluid usually contains no sperm, but can transmit infections. The second is semen: it’s made in the testicles, released with ejaculation, and carries thousands of sperm and any STIs that may be present.

Many sources that discuss the ineffectiveness of withdrawal argue that pre-cum can contain sperm. This is because previous ejaculations can leave some sperm behind in the folds of the penis. While there is a need for further study, it is likely that urination before intercourse washes leftover sperm from the urethra (the tube from which both urine and semen exit the penis).

Using this Method

To ensure no sperm enter the vagina during sex, the male partner should urinate and wipe the tip of the penis before intercourse. During sex, partners can have vaginal-penile sex until the male partner nears ejaculation. It is likely that pre-ejaculate fluid will enter the vagina, but this should not contain sperm nor lead to an unplanned pregnancy.

When the male partner feels close to ejaculation, he must withdraw his penis from his partner’s vagina and vaginal

area. Both partners can continue to stimulate each other and themselves as long as they avoid putting sperm in contact with the vulva. Even sperm outside the vagina, either on the vulva or on the legs near the vulva, can travel to the uterus and cause pregnancy.

Some partners may also choose to have intercourse in the early stages of their sex play, withdraw, and use other forms of stimulation to reach mutual orgasm. This use of withdrawal can reduce anxiety about the timing of a partner’s ejaculation and reduce the risk of an unintended pregnancy.

Awareness

The effectiveness of withdrawal depends on communication between partners before and during sex, as well as the male partner’s knowledge and experience with his own body. Withdrawal may not be effective if the male partner is unable to withdraw before his orgasms.

Partners who are less experienced with withdrawal may have a higher risk of pregnancy during their first attempts with this method. Teens are the age group for which this method is the least effective. To increase effectiveness, new partners may also want to use spermicide or fertility awareness methods to learn when pregnancy is more or less likely during a female partner’s menstrual cycle. If sperm come near or inside the vagina, taking Emergency Contraception can still be an option for preventing pregnancy.

Your Health

Withdrawal is not an effective method for preventing the spread of STIs, including HIV/AIDS.

Side Effects

There are no side effects to using withdrawal. Some partners may experience nervousness that may, in turn, decrease pleasure. Using additional methods of birth control can help reduce anxiety.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- ◆ Free and always available.
- ◆ Has no side effects.
- ◆ Does not alter the menstrual cycle.
- ◆ Does not affect future fertility.
- ◆ Can help partners be more aware of and learn about their sexual responsiveness.
- ◆ More effective with better partner communication.
- ◆ May be a more acceptable form of birth control for people with religious concerns about using other contraceptive tools.
- ◆ More effective than using no birth control.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Nervousness and sexual interruption may lessen pleasure.
- ◆ Relies on male's ability to predict ejaculation and use self-control.
- ◆ Less effective with less sexual experience.
- ◆ Less effective than other methods of birth control.
- ◆ Less effective if under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Joint Participation in Pregnancy Prevention

Like condoms, withdrawal is one of the few methods of birth control that male partners control.

Female partners play an important role in withdrawal through communication and attention to their own and their partners' sexual responses.

The Cervix

The cervix is the opening to the uterus where menstrual blood, babies, and sperm pass. It is also the opening through which abortions are performed. Spermicide and barrier methods of birth control, like the diaphragm, female condom, and cervical cap, work by covering the cervix and preventing sperm from entering the uterus. Hormonal methods of birth control, including oral contraceptives and Depo-Provera, affect the mucus around the cervix and make the opening more resistant to sperm.

Women's bodies naturally produce hormones that change the cervix during a menstrual cycle. You can learn more about your cervix using a speculum to perform a self-exam. For instructions and a speculum, ask your clinician or visit FWHC.org.

Emergency Contraception to Prevent Pregnancy AFTER Sex

You can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse by having a copper IUD inserted within one week of unprotected intercourse or by taking emergency contraception pills. The pills work best in the first 24 to 48 hours but may work for several days. You can get one brand - Plan B - from your local pharmacy without a prescription if you are 17 years or older. If you are under 17 or if you want to use your insurance, you can get the prescription right at the pharmacy by talking with the pharmacist. Go to your local pharmacy to find out more, or call Cedar River Clinics at 800-572-4223 to get Plan B in Renton or Tacoma.

To find Emergency Contraception, see this website: ec.princeton.edu. If you already have birth control pills in your possession, this website explains how to use them as emergency contraception.

Further Resources

- ◆ Contraceptive Technology. Ardent Media at www.contraceptivetechnology.org
- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Boston Women's Health Book Collective at www.ourbodiesourselves.org
- ◆ averting HIV and AIDS at www.avert.org
- ◆ Feminist Women's Health Center at www.FWHC.org and www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info
- ◆ Emergency Contraception (Plan B) at ec.princeton.edu
- ◆ Center for Young Women's Health at youngwomenshealth.org/malecontraceptives2.html
- ◆ If you are uninsured and live in Washington State, you may qualify for FREE birth control under the State sponsored program called Take Charge. Call 800-770-4334 to find out if you qualify for Take Charge.

Cedar River Clinics in Renton and Tacoma, WA make birth control and abortion accessible so that women may decide their futures. www.CedarRiverClinics.org or 800-572-4223

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