

The contraceptive implant: Nexplanon

What is Nexplanon?

Nexplanon is a contraceptive hormonal implant and is a long-acting, reversible birth control method (LARC). A health care provider inserts the implant (a small rod about the size of a matchstick) into the skin of the underside of the upper arm after local anesthetic is used to numb the area — the procedure takes about one minute. It is designed so that it isn't easily visible, but can be felt just underneath the skin. Tissue forms around the rod after insertion, holding it in place. It is effective at preventing pregnancy for up to three years and does not require daily maintenance by the user. Removal and/or replacement of the device requires another visit to a health care provider. With the use of a local anesthetic, a small incision is made in the skin near the tip of the rod to remove it. Ovulation can occur within five days once the rod is removed, so a back-up birth control method, like condoms, may be used. Fertility typically returns to normal within one month.

How does it work to prevent pregnancy?

The rod contains 68 milligrams of etonogestrel (a hormone) that is released slowly over a three-year period. The hormone works to prevent pregnancy by keeping the ovaries from releasing eggs (so they cannot be fertilized by sperm); thickening cervical mucus making it difficult for sperm to enter the uterus; and changing the lining of the uterus to prevent any fertilized eggs from implanting into the uterine wall. After the third year, the implant will continue to release some hormone, but at levels too low to prevent pregnancy.

How effective is this method?

The contraceptive implant is over 99 percent effective at preventing pregnancy. The device is administered by a health care provider, which reduces the risk of user error.

What side effects might I experience while using this method?

The most commonly reported side effect is changes in menstrual bleeding patterns (e.g., longer or shorter periods, time between periods may vary, spotting between periods). Other possible side effects include mood swings, weight gain, headache, and acne — all of which can impact whether or not a person chooses to continue using the method. Some users may experience slight swelling at the site of insertion. There's also a possibility of a small scar once removed.

How can I obtain Nexplanon at Medical Services?

Insertion appointments must be scheduled by calling Medical Services (no online appointments). The insertion appointment is covered by the health service fee for those students who have paid the Columbia Health fee. Students who have the student health insurance plan (Aetna) can use their coverage to get Nexplanon without a copay. Those who would like to make an insertion appointment with Medical Services, but do not have the student health insurance plan or have another insurance plan will need to either:

- Get coverage by reviewing health care exchange options on healthcare.gov or requesting enrollment in student health insurance plan during the open enrollment period,
- Pre-order the device and have it delivered to Medical Services, OR
- Pay out-of-pocket for the device and submit for reimbursement to their insurance company.

What else do I need to know before deciding to use Nexplanon?

The device is currently only available in one formulation and dosage. As such, individuals who are at 135 percent of their recommended body mass index (BMI) may not receive enough of the hormones relative to their body size to prevent pregnancy. The implant is also not recommended for those with a hormone-dependent cancer, active thrombosis, or severe liver disease.

Online & Off-Campus Resources

Medical Services: health.columbia.edu/medical-services

Go Ask Alice!: goaskalice.columbia.edu

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Columbia Health

health.columbia.edu

On-Campus Resources

Medical Services: 212-854-7426

212-854-2284