

The Shot - Depo
Provera

DEPO PROVERA (3-Month Shot)

What is Depo Provera?

Depo-Provera is a pregnancy preventing hormone injection that lasts for three months. The injection has synthetic progesterone and no estrogen. This stops the ovaries from releasing eggs. It also thickens the cervical mucus and changes the uterine lining, so that it's harder for sperm to enter or survive in the uterus. Depo-Provera is a very private form of birth control: it can't be seen on the body and requires no home supplies. It does, however, require a clinic appointment every three months. Depo-Provera is 97 to 99.7% effective as birth control. It does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

Use

Depo-Provera is usually given in the arm or hip, delivering a high level of progesterone into the body. The first shot is usually given during or a few days after the start of a menstrual period. After 24 hours, the shot is effective birth control for the next 13 weeks. Many women find it useful to schedule their next shot slightly earlier than necessary. Then if something prevents them from making their appointment, there will be a window of opportunity to receive their next shot.

If you are more than a week late for your shot, use a backup method of birth control for the next two weeks. If you are more than a week late and you have had unprotected sex since your last shot, consider taking a pregnancy test before receiving the next dose.

Your Health

Due to the risk of serious health problems, women with unexplained vaginal bleeding, or known or suspected pregnancy should not use Depo-Provera.

Depo-Provera may not be recommended for women who are planning on becoming pregnant in the near future, are concerned about weight gain, have liver disease, gallbladder disease, or a history of depression. Study the risks and talk with your health care practitioner.

Health Risks

Studies released in 2004 show that Depo-Provera is associated with loss of bone density, resulting in an increased risk of osteoporosis. Sometimes the bone loss is not reversible when a woman goes off Depo-Provera. Depo is not recommended for long term use and especially not recommended when the young woman is still growing her bones. Women on Depo are advised to exercise and take in plenty of calcium.

Please note that some women have allergic reactions to Depo-Provera.

If a woman becomes pregnant while using Depo-Provera, and continues her pregnancy, there may be an increased risk of premature birth.

The effects of Depo-Provera on breast cancer are still unknown.

Health Benefits

Women on Depo-Provera have a decreased risk of endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, and pelvic inflammatory disease. They may have less menstrual cramping and pain, fewer periods, and less chance of anemia.

Side Effects

Seventy percent of women using Depo-Provera gain weight. Almost half of the women using Depo-Provera gain more than five pounds after one year of use. Many women gain more than ten pounds.

Irregular, heavy, or no bleeding are common side effects of Depo-Provera. After a year of use, many women stop having periods. Lack of a period becomes increasingly common with longer use.

Other side effects of Depo-Provera can include headaches, nervousness, mood changes, bloating, hot flashes, decreased interest in sex, breast tenderness, acne, hair loss, and back ache.

Drug Interactions

Few medications lower the effectiveness of Depo-Provera. Women with Cushing's syndrome may take medications that interfere with Depo-Provera. If you are taking any medications, tell your clinician. When taking medications that may interfere with Depo-Provera, consider adding a backup method of birth control, like condoms or spermicide. As with all drugs, it is useful to inform all your medical providers if you are taking Depo-Provera.

Future Fertility

Women who want to become pregnant may stop using Depo-Provera at any time. For some women, fertility returns immediately. For others, it may take 6 to 18 months or longer for the body's hormone cycle to go back to normal.

Going Off Depo-Provera

After the last shot of Depo-Provera, it can take over six months for the drug to leave the body. Side effects may linger until the drug is completely gone.

Some women chose to eliminate the synthetic hormone from where it is stored in the body's tissues through detoxifying methods such as drinking plenty of water and raw vegetable juice, eating lots of fresh raw organic vegetables, sweating in a steam room or sauna, and getting lots of exercise and fresh air. There's also the option of taking herbal formulas or teas that help balance female hormones, or talking with a naturopathic physician or herbalist.

If you decide to switch from Depo-Provera to another hormonal method like the birth control pill, the vaginal ring, or the contraceptive patch, it is recommended that you start your new method on the date the next injection is due. Use a back-up method of contraception such as male condoms, female condoms, or abstinence for the first seven days of pill use.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- ◆ Private.
- ◆ Effective after 24 hours.
- ◆ Does not require regular attention.
- ◆ Does not interrupt sex play.
- ◆ Has no estrogen.
- ◆ May decrease risk for ovarian and uterine cancers.
- ◆ Can be used starting six weeks after giving birth.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Causes loss of bone density, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.
- ◆ Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Requires injections every 3 months.
- ◆ Delays the return to fertility.
- ◆ Could cause irregular bleeding.
- ◆ Leads to weight gain for many women.

Something to Think About

There is no antidote to the Depo-Provera shot. Women who are given Depo-Provera should be well informed about the drug and know that there are other options for birth control. In this country and in other countries, women have been pressured into taking Depo-Provera without knowing what it was. Know your options.

Further Resources

- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves.* (www.ourbodiesourselves.org)
- ◆ Feminist Women's Health Center. (www.FWHC.org, www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info)
- ◆ Reproductive Health Technologies Project. (www.rhttp.org/contraception/depoprovera/)
- ◆ 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. Then you can apply for Take Charge at Cedar River Clinics.

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
www.facebook.com/CedarRiverClinics