

Fact Sheet

Irregular bleeding while using LARC (Long Acting Reversible Contraception)

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Irregular bleeding is very common when you first start using a LARC but, for nearly all patients, this bleeding pattern will settle (go away) after a few weeks or months.

Being aware (knowing) that irregular bleeding often happens and that it nearly always settles over time helps you cope with it.

Although irregular bleeding is common, don't be worried to discuss it with your doctor. She or he may be able to provide you with medication and advice to lessen, or get rid of, the bleeding.

A small number of women find the bleeding too bothersome, or find that it does not stop over the usual time period. Discuss removing your LARC with your doctor if this is the case.

Is it safe to have no periods at all?

Many women worry that not having periods might be bad for their health, or cause long term problems with their periods or fertility (chances of having a baby). Some women are concerned that it is unnatural to have no regular monthly bleed.

It is helpful to remember that, before there was reliable contraception available, it was common for women to have no periods for many months, or even years, because they were frequently pregnant or breastfeeding. During those times their hormones did not cycle (change throughout the month) and they did not produce an egg (ovulate) each month. Because they were not ovulating, the lining of the uterus did not build up in the normal way and did not need to be lost each month as a period. Thus, for most of history, it has been normal for women to have no periods for many months or even years.

Similarly, the hormones in LARCs also prevent the lining of the uterus from building up each month and so there is no need for a period.

A positive thing about having no periods with LARCs is that we know, from studying women who use LARCs, that they have a lower risk of cancer of the uterus and ovaries than women who have regular 'natural' periods.

How common is troublesome bleeding with LARCs?

With Implanon

- 20% (1 in 5) women's periods stay the same as before
- 34% (1 in 3) women will have light irregular spotting instead of their normal periods
- 7% (less than 1 in 10) women will have periods more often than before
- 18% (slightly less than 1 in 5) women will have continuous bleeding (in some patients this is heavy)
- 20% (1 in 5) women will have no periods at all

It is reassuring to know that half (50%) of women who experience continuous or irregular bleeding on Implanon® will find that it has settled down by 3 months.

With the progesterone IUCD (Mirena®)

Irregular bleeding and spotting is very common straight after the IUCD has been put in but by 6 months 65% of women have no periods at all.

In a very small number of women the irregular bleeding does not settle down or go away completely after 6 months.

With progesterone injections (Depot Provera®)

- Half (50%) of women will have no periods at all
- 1:6 (15%) of women have light, irregular bleeding
- 1:3 (30%) have heavier, irregular bleeding

For most women these bleeding irregularities go away over 3 to 6 months. However, it is important to remember that we cannot remove the Depot injection once it has been given in the way an IUCD or implant can be removed. This means that you may have to wait for the effect of the injection to wear off before your bleeding pattern returns to normal.

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What should I do if I experience irregular bleeding while using a LARC?

If you have just had a LARC inserted and have irregular bleeding which is not bothering you it is okay to just wait and see what happens. This type of bleeding is very common and usually goes away over time.

If you have just started on a LARC and have very heavy, continuous or painful bleeding it is worthwhile talking to your doctor about it. They can check that:

- The LARC is still correctly placed because rarely IUCDs move or are partly expelled (pushed out) from the uterus
- That you do not have an infection
- That you are not pregnant. No contraception is perfect and if you do fall pregnant with a LARC it is important to make sure the pregnancy is not in the tube (ectopic pregnancy)

If you have used a LARC for some time without troublesome bleeding and you suddenly experience heavy or irregular bleeding you should consult your doctor for the same reasons as those listed just above.

What can be done to stop heavy and irregular bleeding on LARCs?

Once your doctor is sure that the bleeding is only due to the hormones in the LARC they can offer you help to stop the bleeding.

- For very heavy bleeding you may be given a 5 day course of tablets like Neurofen® three times a day or a medication called Tranexamic acid for 5 days. These help to stop single episodes of heavy bleeding and can be used repeatedly for a few months until your bleeding has settled into an acceptable pattern.
- For continuous troublesome bleeding you can use the contraceptive pill (the 'pill') for three months – this usually settles the problem down and is seldom needed for longer than three months.

Your doctor will discuss these options with you and make sure that it is safe for you to combine the LARC with another medicine.

If you have used a LARC for some years successfully and you develop irregular bleeding quite close to the time when it needs to be changed for a new one it is often helpful to have the IUCD, implant, or injection earlier than when it is due for changing. This nearly always stops the irregular bleeding.

If you are unhappy about your bleeding pattern with a LARC it can be removed and your periods will return to what they were like before the LARC was inserted. You will need to discuss other contraceptive options with your doctor.



We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:

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