

DMPA

Depo Medroxyprogesterone Acetate

DMPA is a hormonal contraceptive given by injection into the arm or buttock every three months.

QUICK FACTS

Common name:

Depo, the needle.

Medical names:

Depo Medroxyprogesterone Acetate (DMPA), Depo Provera (brand), Depo Ralovera (brand).

Effectiveness:

96% with typical use.

Effectiveness duration:

12 weeks.

Fertility:

Return to fertility can be delayed, typically by 6–12 months.

Who can use it?

Suitable for most people from menarche (start of periods) up to the age of 50.

Hormones:

Contains progestogen hormone.

Visibility:

Discreet but involves 3 monthly injections.

STI's:

No protection.

Side effects:

Amenorrhoea (no periods) or irregular bleeding, which usually decreases over time.

Cost:

Cost depends on your individual situation. Usually less than \$30 per injection.

How to get it:

Book an appointment at a True clinic or with your GP.

DMPA DOES NOT PROTECT AGAINST STI's. TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE PROTECTED AGAINST PREGNANCY AND STI's, USE DMPA PLUS A CONDOM FOR EVERY SEXUAL ENCOUNTER.

DMPA contains the medication medroxyprogesterone acetate, a progestogen. This is similar to the hormone progesterone, which is naturally produced by the ovaries during the menstrual cycle. DMPA is given by injection every 12 weeks and is slowly absorbed into the blood stream to prevent pregnancy. Depo-Provera® and Depo-Ralovera® are the brand names of DMPA available in Australia.

How does DMPA work?

DMPA works by:

- preventing ovulation (egg release from the ovary)
- thickening of the mucus of the cervix so that sperm cannot enter the uterus (womb).

How effective is DMPA?

DMPA is between 99.8% (perfect use) and 96% effective (typical use). This means that of 100 women using DMPA consistently over a year, it is possible that 1 to 4 individuals may become pregnant. It is over 99% effective if the injections are not delayed.

What are the advantages of DMPA as a method of contraception?

- Long acting, effective method of contraception
- Inexpensive
- Undetectable by other people
- Suitable for people who can't take contraceptives that contain oestrogen
- Can be used post partum

Who can use DMPA?

DMPA is suitable for most people, though it is best used between 18 and 50 years of age. For people under 18 years, DMPA can be safely used, however other treatments are offered first. Over the age of 50, other methods are recommended. DMPA can be used while breastfeeding – a small amount of hormone gets into the milk but does not alter the quality of the milk.

Who should not use DMPA injection?

- Anyone with unusual bleeding that has not been investigated
- People with current or past breast cancer or severe liver disease
- People with a previous history of stroke or significant coronary heart disease

Potential benefits of DMPA

- Individuals with heavier periods are likely to have no periods or lighter bleeding
- Individuals with period pain generally experience less pain when using DMPA
- This method can be beneficial for users who experience premenstrual syndrome (PMS) or who have endometriosis
- Can reduce the risk of low iron caused by heavy periods
- Reduces the risk of cancer of the uterus

What happens to periods when DMPA is used for contraception?

DMPA changes bleeding/period patterns. These changes are a result of the hormonal effect to the lining of the uterus. During the first months of use, episodes of irregular bleeding and spotting lasting seven days or longer are common. The frequency and duration of such bleeding decreases with increasing duration of use. After one year of use, 50 percent of people have no bleeding at all and with ongoing use, this rate of amenorrhoea (no periods) increases to 70%.

It is not possible to predict which bleeding pattern will occur, but they can include:

- irregular bleeding or spotting
- prolonged bleeding (this is usually light)
- heavy bleeding (rare).

What are the possible side effects of DMPA?

In addition to altered bleeding patterns, DMPA may also cause:

- weight gain in some individuals
- headaches
- acne
- decreased sex drive
- mood changes.

The injection is long acting and if side effects occur, they may last up to 3 months (it is not possible to reverse the effects of an injection once it is given).



When does fertility return when you stop DMPA?

Fertility can return straight away after DMPA is stopped and it is recommended to change to a new form of contraception if not wanting to fall pregnant. However, return of fertility may be delayed after stopping DMPA. The average time to return to a previous menstrual pattern is 8 months after the last injection. Within 12 months, 50% of people who are trying to conceive will become pregnant. In a small proportion of users, fertility is not back until 18 months after the last injection.

If you are using DMPA and want to fall pregnant in the next 12 months, it is recommended to change to another contraceptive.

What are the possible risks associated with DMPA?

DMPA use is associated with a slight loss of bone density while using the method. Continuing research studies currently suggest:

- this loss is largely reversible once DMPA use finishes
- diet and exercise are other important influences on bone mass in young women
- there is limited evidence of an increase in fracture risk in women who use DMPA.

DMPA use may be associated with a small increase in breast cancer. This risk is not clearly established.

Prolonged DMPA use may be associated with a small increase in the risk of developing meningioma (a benign brain tumour).

How to start using DMPA

Starting DMPA for the first time requires an assessment by a clinician and a prescription.

This assessment enables you to ask any questions you may have and to be certain that it is the most suitable method for you and to ensure that pregnancy can be reliably excluded.

The first injection of DMPA is usually given during the first 5 days of a period. If given at other times, condoms will need to be used for 7 days after the first injection. If there is a chance of an early pregnancy at the time of injection it is recommended to perform a pregnancy test 3–4 weeks later. If you find out that you are pregnant, DMPA does not cause harm to the pregnancy.

What do I need to know about the ongoing use of DMPA?

Follow up DMPA injections are given every 12 weeks to continue protection against pregnancy. If you go beyond 12 weeks from your last injection you may be at risk of pregnancy.

If you aren't certain what to do, seek further advice as soon as possible, particularly if you think you may need emergency contraception.

To renew your DMPA prescription you will need to see a doctor. A review of benefits and risks for ongoing DMPA use is recommended every 1-2 years.

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