



# Injectable Contraceptives

Injectable contraceptives are injections which, like the oral contraceptive pills, contain hormones. Once injected, they continuously release the hormones into the body until the period of their effectiveness and this helps prevent pregnancy.

## Injectable contraceptives can be of two different types.

- 1. Progestin-only injectables** – These contain a type of progesterone hormone only. The commonly available ones are Depo-Provera which needs to be injected once every three months, and NET-EN which needs to be injected every two months.
- 2. Combined injectable contraceptives** – These are injectables that contain a combination of the hormones estrogen and progesterone and need to be taken every month. E.g. Cyclo-Provera

Injectables like Depo-Provera, otherwise called DMPA, have been available through private pharmacies for several years in India. Since 2016, the Government of India has made available the injectable contraceptive DMPA under the name Antara through the National Family Planning Programme. Since this is the most commonly used injectable contraceptive in India, we will focus on this in the sections below.

### How does it work?

Depo-Provera (Antara) injections contain hormones and work like the oral contraceptive pills.

- They prevent the maturation of eggs in the ovary.
- They make the cervical mucus thick, thus making it difficult for sperms to enter the uterus.

Injectable contraceptives are usually started in the first week of the menstrual period. Following this, the Depo-Provera (Antara) injection has to be taken once every three months.

## Who cannot use this?

- Pregnant women
- Women who are breastfeeding and are within 6 weeks of childbirth
- Women with breast or cervical cancer
- Women with excessive or irregular bleeding during the menstrual periods
- In addition, injectable contraceptives may not be suitable for women for whom oral contraceptive pills have been found to be unsuitable.

## Benefits

This is a reversible method; one can stop the injections when one desires to have another pregnancy. Unlike pills and some other methods, one does not need to remember to use the method every day or at every act of sex. Injectable contraceptives reduce menstrual bleeding and therefore protect against anaemia.

## Adverse effects

- Injectable contraceptives can cause several changes in the menstrual cycle. Three out of every five women using injectables report having no menstrual bleeding at all. Often, the injectable contraceptive can cause irregular bleeding, and rarely, excessive bleeding.
- There is a belief that injectable contraceptives increase the chances of cancer. Studies are not clear on this. Like oral pills, there seems to be a slight increase in risk of breast cancer with the use of Depo-Provera. Similarly, there also seems to be a slight increase in risk of cervical cancer. Whether these are

caused by the injectables or are because of earlier diagnosis in these women is not clear. On the other hand, Depo-Provera is known to protect against cancer of the uterine lining.

- Depo-Provera is also known to cause a slight decrease in bone density and may result in osteoporosis and fractures later in life.
- Weight gain is a common and temporary side effect with the use of Depo-Provera. Giddiness and nausea are common. These side effects are common to all hormonal methods.
- Once injectables are stopped, it usually takes between four to nine months for ovulation to resume. Thus, one would have to wait for this duration to get pregnant again. Rarely, fertility may not return.
- If one has migraine headaches, blurring of vision, or is feeling low or depressed, it is best to seek health care.

Depo Provera is now available in government health facilities free of cost as Antara, an injection that needs to be taken every 3 months.

**Injectable contraceptives are reversible methods and can be discontinued when one desires a pregnancy.**



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