Not Ready for Parenthood?

How to find a birth control method that's right for you.

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Although having a child is one of life's miracles, many people want to control when and if they become parents. There are numerous contraceptive options, but the possibilities can be overwhelming. Here are a few things to think about before you choose a method.

"Patients should consider their age, medical history, whether they are pregnant and their mental ability to follow directions [required for each method]," says Denise Davis, MD, an author and board-certified ob/gyn.

Davis also advises people to think about the existing risks and possible side effects of the birth control method they choose. These can influence whether users will be able to faithfully adhere to that contraceptive method.

In brief, birth control methods are divided into two types: Non-hormonal options (condoms, diaphragms and cervical caps) create a barrier between the sperm and egg. And hormonal options (birth control pills, skin patches, injections, various intrauterine devices—IUDs—and implants) release the female hormones progesterone or estrogen to prevent ovulation (when the ovaries release an egg).

Although Davis doesn't believe one size fits all when it comes to contraceptives, she refuses to recommend the rhythm method, which supposedly predicts when a woman is fertile based on a record of the length of previous menstrual cycles. "I wouldn't trust [it]," she says. "That's asking for trouble."

Before choosing a contraceptive method, schedule an appointment with your doctor to discuss your sexual lifestyle and relationships with partners.

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