

Depo-Provera

Contraceptive Injection

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is it?

Depo-Provera (depot medroxyprogesterone acetate or DMPA) is a long-acting progestin (hormone) form of birth control. It is injected into the muscle or under the skin every three months. It is effective 24 hours after your first injection if given in the first 5 days of a normal menstrual period. You must abstain or use a backup method for 7 days if started any other time in your cycle. You will need to receive your injection every 13 weeks in order to continue your contraceptive protection. It is recommended that you have a pregnancy test if you have gone more than 15 weeks since your last injection.

How does it work?

It inhibits the secretion of hormones that stimulate the ovaries. This prevents ovulation. It also thickens your cervical mucus to prevent the entrance of sperm into the uterus, and thins out the lining of your uterus.

How effective is it?

With continuous use, there is less than a 1% chance of experiencing an accidental pregnancy. This rate assumes that no shots are missed.

What are some reasons to use Depo-Provera?

- You don't want to have to remember to take medicine everyday.
- You need a highly reliable and private method of birth control.
- You would be comfortable with having your menstrual periods stop.

- You have strong menstrual cramps.
- You can't take estrogen-containing contraceptives due to other medical conditions.

What are some reasons NOT to use it?

- You are pregnant or suspect you might be pregnant.
- You have abnormal vaginal bleeding that has not been evaluated.
- You have had a stroke or cardiovascular disease.
- You have serious liver disease.
- You are being treated for or have a history of breast cancer.
- You are allergic to Depo-Provera.
- You have a history of stress fractures, amenorrhea, anorexia nervosa, rheumatoid arthritis or chronic glucocorticoid therapy because of the effect on bone mineral density.
- You plan to become pregnant in the next year as there may be a period of 10 to 12 months after stopping depo to return to menstruation.

What are the side effects?

The side effects are usually not serious, but it is important to realize that once Depo-Provera is injected it cannot be reversed or neutralized. You will have to live with the side effects until the medicine wears off over several months.

- Menstrual irregularities

Many people will have irregular bleeding or spotting in the first 3 - 6 months of

Depo-Provera use. This is the most common reason women decide to discontinue Depo. Eventually, the majority of users will stop menstruating and after 5 years, 80% no longer menstruate. This is not harmful, but some people are uncomfortable with the lack of periods. Others appreciate the decrease in menstrual cramps or heavy bleeding.

- Weight gain

Weight gain can occur in users of Depo-Provera, but the amount gained is variable, usually less than 5 pounds. Most users will not gain weight.

- Depression

Individual people using Depo-Provera may experience an increase in depression. Studies evaluating its effect upon mood have reported conflicting results with some showing a slight increase in depression and others showing no effect. A history of depression is not a contradiction of Depo use.

- Other symptoms

Other symptoms can include headache, dizziness, fatigue, nervousness, a decrease in sex drive, an increase in acne, hair thinning, and breast tenderness. They may or may not be caused by Depo-Provera. You can discuss any of these side effects with your provider.

What are other medical considerations?

- Delay in ability to become pregnant.

After discontinuing Depo-Provera, you may have a 10 - 12 month delay in return to fertility.

- Cancer

Most studies have found no increased risk of breast cancer in Depo-Provera users. One study found a small increase in risk in people who had used Depo within the last five years but no increase with longer use. This could reflect better detection or acceleration in the growth of existing tumors. There is no increased risk of ovarian or cervical cancer. There is a significant reduction in the risk of endometrial cancer.

- Decreased bone mineral density (BMD)

There is a warning issued by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regarding the use of Depo-Provera (DMPA) for more than two years due to concerns about reduced bone mineral density (BMD). In 2014 the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) issued an opinion that DMPA is highly effective contraception and that the loss in BMD appears to be mostly or fully reversible after stopping the injections. You should have a discussion with a provider about your individual risk and what you can do for your bone health.

- Sexually transmitted infections

Depo-Provera does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It is important to discuss STI protection with your partner and to use a condom every time you have sex.

Serious problems are rare with Depo-Provera use.

Call your medical provider immediately if you experience any of the following:

- prolonged, very heavy vaginal bleeding
- repeated, very painful headaches
- persistent pain, redness or bleeding at the injection site
- depression
- severe lower abdominal pain