



Depo-Provera Contraceptive Injection

Patient Education Series

What is it?

Depo-Provera is a long-acting progestin (hormone) form of birth control. It is injected into the muscle every 11 weeks. It is effective 24 hours after your first injection if given in the first 5 days of a normal menstrual period.

You will need to receive your injection promptly every 11 weeks in order to continue your contraceptive protection.

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.

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. This rate is also comparable to tubal ligation.

What are some reasons to use Depo-Provera?

- u You find it difficult to remember to take medicine every day.
- u You are on long-term antibiotics or Accutane.
- u You would be comfortable with having your menstrual periods stop (also known as amenorrhea).
- u You are nursing a baby (post-partum).
- u You have valvular heart disease.

What are some reasons NOT to use it?

- u You are pregnant or suspect you might be pregnant.
- u You have abnormal vaginal bleeding that has not been evaluated.
- u You have had a stroke.
- u You have serious liver disease.
- u You are being treated for or have a history of breast cancer.
- u You have or have had blood clots in legs, lungs or eyes.
- u You are allergic to Depo-Provera.

If you have or have had migraine headaches, depression, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, liver disease, asthma or a seizure problem, please tell your medical provider. Depo-Provera may make these problems worse.

Since it is unclear whether smoking while using Depo-

Provera increases the risks of heart attack and stroke, **it is recommended that women who use Depo-Provera should not smoke.**

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 in 3 months.**

Menstrual irregularities

Bleeding, spotting and amenorrhea (not having periods) are common. After a year of Depo-Provera injections, 57% of women are not menstruating. After 2 years, 68% of women are not menstruating. If you stop getting Depo-Provera injections, your period usually returns within 3 to 10 months.

Pregnancy-like symptoms

These symptoms include sore breasts, nausea, fatigue, and abdominal discomfort. They may occur after the first 4 injections but usually go away. If you experience a spotty darkening of the skin (usually on the face), this symptom may not go away completely.

Weight changes

Weight changes may occur due to increased appetite. Average weight gain is 3 pounds by the end of the 1st year and 5 to 7 pounds, total, by the end of the 2nd year.

- u 33.5% of women on Depo-Provera gain weight
- u 20% of women on Depo-Provera lose weight
- u 10% of women on Depo-Provera have no change in their weight.

Depression

Depression may occur but the cause is unclear. It does go away if you stop using Depo-Provera.

Other symptoms

Other symptoms can include headache, dizziness, nervousness, some loss of scalp hair, some increase in body hair, a decrease in sex drive, leg cramps, and bloating. They may or may not be caused by Depo-Provera.

Report any of these side effects to your medical provider immediately.

What are other medical drawbacks and risks?

Delay in ability to become pregnant

After the last injection of Depo-Provera, it takes an average of 9 to 12 months to become pregnant:

- u 68% of women conceive within 12 months.
- u 83% of women conceive within 15 months.
- u 93% of women conceive within 18 months.

These rates are not related to the length of time you were taking Depo-Provera.

Cancer

One study found a slightly increased risk of breast cancer, especially for women under age 35. There is no increased risk of ovarian, uterine, cervical or liver cancer.

Osteoporosis

Use of Depo-Provera has been associated with a decrease in the amount of calcium in your bones, which can increase your chance of bone fractures. The rate of calcium loss is greatest in the early years of use. **Regular exercise, calcium in the diet or a calcium supplement, and not smoking can help prevent osteoporosis in all women.**

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.

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

- u prolonged, very heavy vaginal bleeding
- u unusual swelling or pain in the legs
- u severe chest pain, sudden shortness of breath or coughing up blood
- u bad headaches or blurred vision
- u a lump in your breast
- u persistent pain, redness or bleeding at the injection site