



# Intrauterine Device (IUD)

## PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

### What is an IUD?

An IUD is a small device that is inserted into the uterus by a gynecologist to prevent pregnancy. Only 2 IUDs are currently available in the United States: The ParaGard T Copper IUD and the Mirena levonorgestrel-releasing IUD. IUDs are a form of reversible long-term contraception. The ParaGard T may be left in place for 10 years; Mirena may be left in place for 5 years.

### How does it work?

The ParaGard T works primarily as a spermicide. Copper ions inhibit sperm mobility so that the sperm are unable to reach the fallopian tube to fertilize the ovum. The Mirena system in addition, releases the hormone levonorgestrel, causing cervical mucus to become thicker, immobilizing the sperm. The lining of the uterus is also altered so that implantation of a fertilized ovum is prevented.

### How do you get an IUD?

IUDs must be inserted by a health care provider. IUDs are not available at Brown Health Services. You may ask a provider for a referral to an outside gynecologist. IUDs can be convenient and efficient contraception for women in a long term monogamous relationship for whom other contraceptive methods are not appropriate. They are cost effective (over the long term) and permit spontaneous sexual activities. They may offer some protection against endometrial and cervical cancer. However, the office procedure for insertion and removal may be somewhat uncomfortable. Some women experience an increase in menstrual flow and increased pain during periods with ParaGard. Mirena may improve pain during the period and cause a decrease in blood flow. There is a small increased risk of infection/perforation of the uterus. IUDs are occasionally expelled spontaneously from the uterus, so women need to check the strings that protrude from the cervix. They do not offer any protections against STIs.

### Who should not use an IUD?

The choice to use an IUD should be discussed with your health provider. The following are people who generally are advised against using an IUD:

- Women with multiple sex partners.
- Women who are pregnant.
- Women with active cervicitis (inflamed cervix), unresolved abnormal PAP, or a history of gynecological cancers.
- Women with HIV/AIDS.
- Women with allergies to copper (cannot use ParaGard) or levonorgestrel (cannot use Mirena).
- Pelvic infection within the past 3 months.
- Women with a history of ectopic pregnancy.
- Women with a history of anemia cannot use ParaGard).
- Women who want to use contraception for a short period of time.
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding.

At one time, it was thought that only women who had given birth could tolerate the IUD. Although the IUD is not for adolescents, it has been used successfully by women who have never been pregnant.

### How effective are IUDs?

IUDs are very effective. Depending on the type of IUD the perfect use failure rate in the first year is 0.1-0.6%. The typical use failure rate is 0.7-0.8%.

**Note:** In the 1980s more models of IUDs were being used. One type, the Dalkon Shield was discontinued because the porous material of the string wicked bacteria into the uterus causing infection. The new IUDs do not use the problematic string of the Dalkon Shield.