

What is an intrauterine device or IUD?

An IUD is a small device that is inserted in the uterus. IUDs are primarily used as birth control (contraception) and are among the most effective methods. IUDs may also be used for management of heavy menstrual bleeding, control of pain associated with menstruation, and treatment of endometrial conditions (issues with the lining of the uterus). IUDs are long-lasting and many people find them convenient.

What is the procedure for inserting an IUD?

An IUD is placed by a healthcare provider. It is a routine same-day procedure that usually takes 5 to 15 minutes. The healthcare provider may take additional time to ensure the procedure is as comfortable as possible. Complications during IUD insertion are rare.

The typical steps for IUD insertion procedure:

- The healthcare provider performs a pelvic exam to check the uterus and cervix. An STI (*sexually transmitted infection*) check may also be done at this time.
- The cervix and surrounding area are cleansed with an antiseptic solution.
- The IUD is inserted through the cervix into the uterus.
- The strings attached to the device may be trimmed.
- If needed, the healthcare provider performs an ultrasound or manual exam to confirm that the IUD has been correctly positioned.

Is IUD insertion painful?

IUD insertion can be painful for some people and mild to moderate cramping is common. There may be brief moments of sharp pain, especially as the IUD passes through the cervix. Some people describe a fullness or pressure as the IUD is placed in the uterus.

After the procedure, there can be a lingering soreness in the lower belly.

Stress and worry can also increase pain. However, most people find that the discomfort associated with IUD insertion is manageable and goes away within a couple days.

How can I manage pain during IUD placement?

There are a number of techniques to reduce discomfort and pain during gynaecologic procedures, and we are still learning about how well they work for managing pain during IUD insertion.

For all strategies you consider, discuss the pros and cons with your healthcare provider. Together you can tailor a pain management plan to fit your unique needs and preferences. Below is a short list of strategies to explore.

Review each step of the IUD insertion process and aftercare

Ask your healthcare provider to explain the entire IUD insertion procedure step-by-step, highlighting points where you may feel discomfort or pain and describing equipment or supplies that will be used. If any part of the procedure is unclear, ask for clarification. Make sure you understand what happens after your IUD is inserted as well. Knowing what to expect can decrease worry and reduce pain.

Communicate your needs and preferences

It is important that you feel safe and in control while having your IUD inserted. Let your healthcare provider know how you are doing before and during the procedure. If it helps you, let them know about past negative or upsetting experiences that cause you to worry about getting the IUD. Your healthcare provider can better support you if they understand your concerns. Remember: you can ask to pause, stop, or check-in throughout the IUD insertion. If it is difficult for you to state your needs and preferences, consider bringing an advocate.

Bring an emotional support person

Having a trusted person come with you can make your experience more comfortable. Your support person can provide reassurance, discuss the procedure with you, help you with transportation, and support your rest and recovery afterward.

Use relaxation and distraction techniques

Relaxation and distraction can make you feel more at ease during the IUD insertion and may also reduce pain. Relaxation techniques are methods of promoting a sense of calm. One example of this is deep belly breathing: inhale deeply and slowly through your nose, fill your belly and hold briefly, exhale slowly and completely through your mouth, repeat. Distraction techniques involve redirecting attention toward something positive. Examples include counting shapes or colours, visualizing yourself in a serene environment and paying attention to the details, or repeating positive statements to yourself (affirmations).

Consider medications for pain control and relaxation

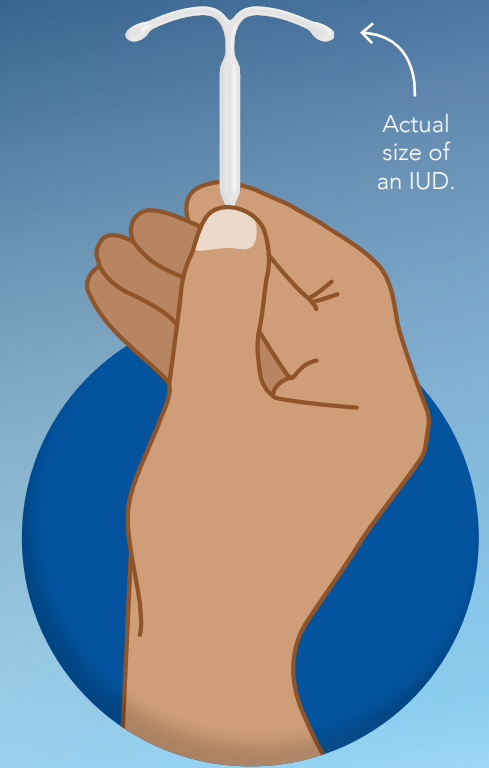
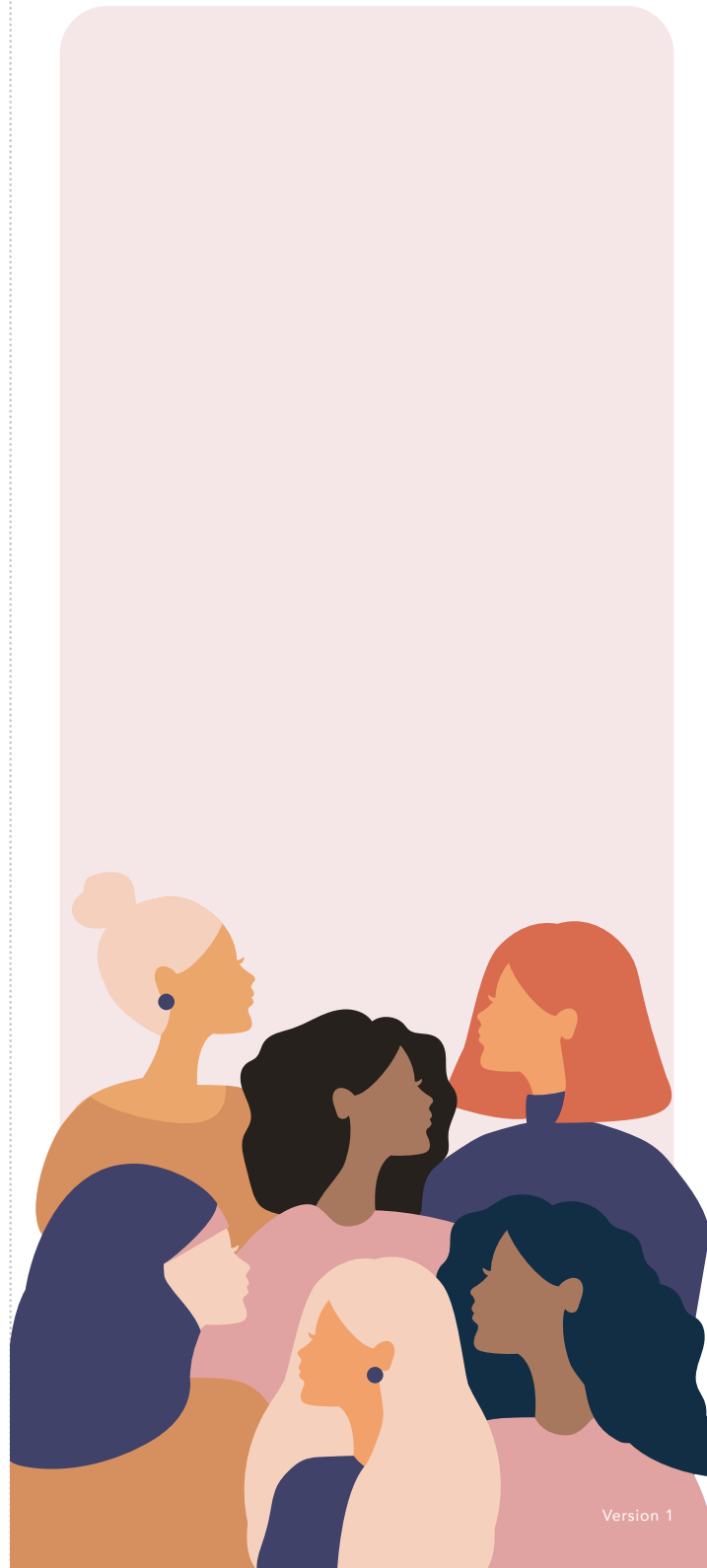
Before the procedure, your healthcare provider might suggest using over-the-counter pain relievers or could prescribe a stronger option. These options can include oral pain medications and local numbing agents (cream, gel, spray, or injection to numb the cervix). Consult with your healthcare provider for information about dosages, timing, and potential side effects. If you are experiencing significant distress about the procedure, your healthcare provider may prescribe a medication to help improve your sense of wellbeing before and during the IUD insertion.

Questions for my Healthcare Provider

IUD Insertion: A Guide to Easing Discomfort

provides general information and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult with your healthcare provider about your healthcare goals and whether an IUD is a suitable option for your needs.

This patient guide is a supplementary resource to the SOGC's position statement on intrauterine devices, counseling and pain management.



IUD Insertion

A GUIDE TO EASING DISCOMFORT

This guide is designed to help you and your healthcare provider discuss pain-reducing strategies to make the process of inserting an intrauterine device (IUD) more comfortable.