



Contraceptive Implant – ICGP Patient Information Leaflet

The contraceptive implant is a small 4cm long plastic rod that sits under the skin in the upper arm. It releases a small amount of a progesterone (etonogestrel) steadily over three years to prevent pregnancy. The contraceptive implant available in Ireland is called the **Implanon NXT**.

How does the contraceptive implant work?

The progesterone only contraceptive implant releases a small amount of a progesterone (etonogestrel) into the bloodstream. This stops the ovaries ovulating (producing eggs) and thickens the mucus at the cervix (neck of the womb) which makes it more difficult for sperm to enter the womb.

How effective is the contraceptive implant at preventing pregnancy?

The contraceptive implant is a very effective method of contraception. After one year of use, only 1 in 2,000 women will become pregnant using this method. No contraceptive method will prevent all pregnancies. The contraceptive implant does not offer any protection against sexually transmitted infections.

When can I have the contraceptive implant fitted?

If you are not using any other form of hormonal contraception, the contraceptive implant is usually fitted in the first five days of your menstrual cycle (the first five days of your period). If you are using hormonal contraception, you may be able to have your implant fitted outside of this time period. Your healthcare provider will discuss this with you if appropriate.

How is the contraceptive implant fitted?

The contraceptive implant is inserted under the skin in the upper arm. A small amount of local anaesthetic is first injected into the skin to numb the area. A few minutes later the implant is injected under the skin. Both you and the healthcare provider inserting the implant will check that you can feel the implant in your arm after insertion. After this, a dressing will be applied, and you will be given advice about how to look after your wound. The procedure takes 5 to 10 minutes in total. A sample to check for sexually transmitted infections may also be taken at this visit.

If I have allergies can I still have the contraceptive implant fitted?

A small amount of local anaesthetic is used to numb the skin when a contraceptive implant is being inserted

or removed. You should let your healthcare provider know if you have ever had an allergic reaction to a local anaesthetic in the past e.g. when having dental work done. It is also important to let your healthcare provider know if you have an allergy to another contraceptive or any other medication.

What medications can interfere with the contraceptive implant?

A small number of medications may interfere with the hormone (etonogestrel) in the contraceptive implant. You should let your healthcare provider know if you are using any prescription or over the counter medications, particularly if you are on medication for epilepsy or HIV infection. Some of these medications may reduce the effectiveness of the implant, increasing the risk of an unintended pregnancy.

Who is the contraceptive implant not suitable for?

The contraceptive implant is suitable for most women. However, for a small number of women it may not be suitable. This includes women with a history of breast cancer, women with unexplained abnormal vaginal bleeding, severe liver disease, or a history of stroke while using the contraceptive implant previously.

What side-effects can occur with the contraceptive implant?

- **Changes in vaginal bleeding:** Your pattern of vaginal bleeding may change while using the contraceptive implant. 1 in 5 women will have no bleeding (periods) at all. 3 in 5 women will bleed irregularly (they won't have a regular period) but this is usually not frequent or heavy. The remaining 1 in 5 women may bleed frequently, heavily or for longer. If this goes on for more than three months after the implant is inserted, you should contact your healthcare provider for further advice. You may be offered further treatment to reduce bleeding or you may require some investigations to rule out other causes of a change in bleeding pattern.

- **Progestogenic (Hormonal) side-effects:**

Some women are more prone to side-effects with hormonal contraception. Common hormone (progesterone) related side-effects include breast tenderness, bloating, headaches, acne, or mood changes. Contact your healthcare provider if these are persistent or severe.

- **Migration (Movement) of the implant:**

The contraceptive implant is inserted subdermally (under the skin). After insertion, you should always be able to feel the contraceptive implant in your arm. If at any stage you are unable to feel the implant, contact your healthcare provider for further advice. They will arrange to examine your arm. If they are also unable to feel the device, they will arrange an ultrasound to see where it is. With the newer insertion devices, deep insertion into the muscle is rare, but occasionally the device may need to be removed in hospital using an ultrasound machine.

- **Bruising/Bleeding:** Mild bruising or bleeding is common after insertion of the contraceptive implant. This is rarely severe and resolves within 1–2 weeks.

- **Infection:** As with any surgical procedure, there is a small risk of infection after a contraceptive implant is inserted. If you have any concerns about this (redness around the wound, discharge from the wound, fever etc) please contact your healthcare provider to arrange a review.

- **Scarring:** Insertion of the contraceptive implant results in a very tiny scar on the upper inner arm. When the device is removed, this will result in an additional small scar at a nearby location.

- **Breakage:** Occasionally the contraceptive implant may break into two or more pieces. If you are concerned this may have happened, you should notify your healthcare provider. Your implant is unlikely to need to be removed earlier than planned, but it may require more than one small incision (cut) to remove all the pieces safely.

Removal:

Your contraceptive implant needs to be removed after three years or it may no longer be effective at preventing pregnancy. It is removed by your healthcare provider who will numb the skin over the implant with a local anaesthetic. They will then make a small cut with a scalpel and carefully remove the implant. This procedure takes approximately ten minutes. If you wish to have a new implant inserted, it can then be inserted through the same incision. It is your responsibility to contact your healthcare provider when your implant is due for removal or replacement. Failure to do so may result in a risk of unintended pregnancy.

Pre-Insertion Information:

Following your initial consultation, you will be given a prescription for your contraceptive implant. This prescription can be filled at your local pharmacy. The contraceptive implant does not need to be refrigerated so it can be collected in advance of your appointment for convenience.

If you are using reliable contraception (any hormonal contraception) you can have your contraceptive implant fitted at any time in your cycle i.e. you do not need to wait for your period to arrange insertion. You may require additional contraceptive precautions for one week after your implant insertion. Your healthcare provider will discuss this with you on the day of your appointment.

If you are not using hormonal contraception currently (or using condoms only), then your implant is inserted during the first five days of your period. If your periods

are regular, you can book this in advance. If your periods are irregular, please phone the surgery when your period begins to arrange your appointment.

It is important that you tell the secretary you are having a contraceptive implant fitted. This is so they can allocate sufficient time for the appointment.

On the day of your appointment, you should attend the surgery at your allotted time. You will need to bring the Implanon NXT with you in its packaging. The inner packaging keeps the insertion device sterile so it is important that this is not opened prior to your appointment. You will need to provide a urine sample on arrival so that a pregnancy test can be done before the procedure commences.

If you have any questions, they can be addressed on the day. If you require a callback in advance of your appointment, please contact the surgery to arrange this.