Question: Is a LARC right for me?

LARC? Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive, AKA an IUD or a hormonal contraceptive implant. #acronyms

IUD: Intrauterine-device; a small (think the size of your pinky finger, or smaller!) t-shaped piece of plastic that is put in a uterus to guard against sperm fertilizing an egg. It can be removed at any time. There are very thin, very short strings that hang down from the uterus, and you can use these to check to make sure your IUD is in place.

Once an IUD is inserted, it lasts for anywhere from three and twelve years, depending on the type of IUD. It’s invisible, easy, and one of the most effective forms of birth control! Bonus: it’s good for a quickie! [Always use a condom or other barrier method to protect against STDS!]

Let’s talk about the different kinds:

First, Mirena. You’ve probably seen the commercial with the carefree Mom traipsing happily around her yard. Girlfriend got an IUD! Mirena is a hormonal option, releasing a small amount of synthetic progestin to help prevent sperm from reaching your cervix. It lasts for up to 5 years, can give you lighter periods, or potentially go away entirely!

Paraguard: In it for the long haul? This IUD can stay in your body for up to 12 years! Unlike Mirena, Paraguard holds a small amount of copper (totally safe!) and shouldn’t alter your periods. It can be removed at any time.

And the newest, Skyla: Skyla’s benefit over its counterparts is its size. It is considered to be smaller than the Mirena or Paraguard, and potentially less uncomfortable to be inserted, especially into a uterus that has not had a child. It also releases a synthetic hormone like the Mirena IUD.

Pros:

• No need to remember a pill every day! Alarm reminders be gone.
• While condoms should be used every time to protect against STD’s, there’s nothing else you have to think of before sex!
• You can return to your ability to get pregnant at ANY time
• No one has to know you have it! It’s a private, easy way to prevent pregnancy
• Pay once and you’re done- no monthly visits to the pharmacy. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, if you have health insurance, chances are good that you’ll be able to get this method with no out-of-pocket cost
Cons:

- There can be some discomfort with insertion (completely different for everyone!), but many providers will offer anti-inflammatory drugs, a hot pack, or allowing friends/family in the room to reduce these effects as much as possible. Talk to your doctor about the steps you can take together.
- There can be some pain or cramping for a few days after insertion
- If having a period every month is comforting to you, an IUD may not be the best option. Everyone is different, but periods can reduce to almost nothing or go away entirely. If you need that reassurance, consider other methods!
- As with any medical procedure, there is risk for potential infection with insertion, not with the actual device itself.

For more information on your birth control options, check out these great resources, including birth control options at Student Health Services:

- Bedsider
- Women's Health Services: Claremont University Consortium
- Planned Parenthood: Birth Control

Do you have questions about sexual health? Submit them anonymously at tiernanfieldhouse@scrippscollege.edu or in our suggestion box at TFH! Our certified health educators will find the answer!

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