

Whole Woman's Health of Austin
Transforming Healthcare One Woman at a Time
7648 Belair Road* Baltimore, MD 21236
410-661-2900
DMPA (Depo Medroxyprogesterone Acetate)
DEPO PROVERA—"The Shot"

What is it?

DMPA is an injectable form of birth control given every 3 months. Its active ingredient is a synthetic form of the hormone progesterone, one of the hormones used in some birth control pills and naturally produced in the female body.

How does it work?

Similar to oral contraceptives, the hormone in the depo shot prevents ovulation. When a woman does not ovulate (release an egg), she cannot become pregnant.

How do I use it? How do I get it?

You can receive a DMPA injection at Whole Woman's Health. You need to receive an injection every three months. In order to prevent pregnancy, you need to avoid sexual intercourse or use condoms and spermicides for the first 2 weeks after receiving your first injection.

What are the advantages?

Unlike oral contraceptives, the DMPA shot does not have any estrogen in it, so DMPA is often recommended for women who smoke or have estrogen-related side effects on oral contraceptives (like headaches, water retention, or nausea).

Many women like DMPA because it is easy—you only have to think about it 4 times yearly. If you decide to try and become pregnant, most women who become pregnant do so within 1 year of stopping injections of DMPA. The length of time you use DEPO-PROVERA has no effect on how long it will take you to get pregnant after stopping the injections.

What are the disadvantages? What are the possible side effects?

Irregular bleeding, spotting, or periods stopping altogether are the most noticeable changes, or side effects of DMPA, and occur in most women. Because the ovaries are in a "resting state," the lining of the uterus does not grow and menstrual bleeding does not occur. With continued use, bleeding usually decreases. At the end of the first year, most women on DMPA stop menstruating completely.

Some women may gain weight while taking DMPA. Other common side effects include nervousness, dizziness, stomachache, headache, and fatigue. The shot cannot be reversed after it has been injected and you must wait the full 3 months for the effects to wear off should you have side effects or change your mind about using DMPA.

DMPA may be also associated with a decrease in the amount of mineral stored in your bones; this could increase your risk of bone fractures (osteoporosis). We recommend 1000-1500 mg of calcium supplements a day.

How effective is it?

DMPA is more than 99% effective.

Who cannot use this method?

Women who are pregnant, have unusual vaginal bleeding, who are over 35 and smoke, who have severe migraine headaches, high blood pressure, psychiatric problems, blood clots, liver disease, or who have a personal or family history of breast cancer, stroke, or diabetes will want to talk to a doctor before starting DMPA.

***Remember, only a latex condom or polyurethane condom can protect you from HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.