What is Contraception?

Contraception, or birth control, is the process or means used to prevent pregnancy. A variety of options are available including the use of hormone medications, contraceptive devices (barriers), periods of avoiding sexual intercourse, and surgery. In this brochure you will read about the guidelines found in Islam to help you decide on the method of contraception that is right for you and your spouse.

Birth Control and Islam

The Muslim Women’s League has provided this and other brochures for your convenience to assist you in making decisions about your health while keeping in mind the guidelines found in Islam. In no way is the information found in these brochures intended to take the form of a fatwa or an absolute Islamic law. Our intention is to better inform Muslim women and their families about their health, and we pray that Allah may accept our efforts.

As difficult a subject as this is, we Muslims must acknowledge that unwanted pregnancies do occur in our community, often under very unfortunate circumstances. The best way to deal with this problem is by prevention. For unmarried women, this means abstaining from sexual relations until marriage. For married women, using an effective method of birth control consistently offers the best chance at preventing pregnancy. However, people are not perfect and mistakes occur and all birth control methods have a failure rate. In the US, many women who are faced with an unwanted pregnancy opt for pregnancy termination (abortion) which is legal until the 24th week (sixth month) of gestation. For most women, making the decision to get an abortion is often a difficult and highly emotional process that can have lasting effects. Other women choose to carry the pregnancy to term and give the infant up for adoption at the time of birth. Of course, many (and perhaps most) women (and couples) who are faced with an unwanted pregnancy simply accept the situation and keep and raise the child.

Early scholars of Islam considered abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy (up to 3 months) to be a form of birth control practiced by women and therefore not prohibited. Their rationale was based on the hadith that says that ensoulment of the fetus does not take place until a certain number of days has passed after conception. Among the schools of thought the range was somewhere between 40 and 80 days (and up to 120 in one madhab). After that, abortion was considered haram as the unborn child was believed to be a person at that point, with all of the rights normally afforded to living children. Exceptions to this rule were made when the mother’s life was in danger from the pregnancy, when continuation of the pregnancy would compromise the life of a child already living (e.g., by depleting the supply of breast milk on which the child depended), or when the fetus suffered from a lethal anomaly (which means death was certain at the time of birth.)

Today, the vast majority of Muslim scholars have ruled that life begins at conception and therefore to take that life at any time thereafter would be prohibited. Their conclusion is based on medical evidence that indicates the presence of a nervous system and functioning heart very early in pregnancy (within the first 3 weeks), which is a sign of human viability. Therefore, most Muslims believe that abortion at any time in the pregnancy is haram (prohibited), except under the conditions mentioned above.

According to some scholars, abortion is also lawful when the pregnancy occurs as a result of rape or incest. To others, however, the child is considered to be free of guilt from the sins of the parents and therefore should not be punished by being aborted. This continues to be an area of debate.

Women who are faced with an unwanted pregnancy need support and encouragement from their loved ones. This applies to the young unmarried woman who made an error and the support of the community. These are difficult situations that require thoughtful attention and ongoing discussion.

A Word About Unwanted Pregnancy
## Contraception Options

### Barrier Methods:
- **Spermicides**: Contraceptive foams, jellies, creams, and suppositories contain chemical spermicides which, when inserted into the vagina, prevent pregnancy by killing sperm before they enter the uterus.
- **Condom**: A condom is placed over the man’s erect penis. It can also prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Diaphragm**: A diaphragm is inserted into the woman’s vagina before intercourse. Diaphragms should be used along with spermicidal jellies or creams for maximum effectiveness.
- **Cervical Cap**: Like diaphragms, cervical caps are inserted into the woman’s vagina to cover the cervix and prevent sperm from entering the uterus. Cervical caps should also be used with spermicidal jellies or creams.

### Hormonal Methods:
- **Hormonal methods** contain a hormone that prevents pregnancy through prevention of ovulation. These methods can be injected, implanted, or taken orally (pill).
- **Injection**: The birth control shot, administered every 3 months, contains a hormone that prevents pregnancy. Women receive the injection in the buttocks or arm every 3 months.
- **Implant**: Implants are small, flexible sticks containing hormones that prevent pregnancy when taken daily. Today’s implants can prevent pregnancy for 5 years, and once removed, the woman is again able to conceive.
- **Birth Control Pill**: Birth control pills contain hormones that prevent pregnancy when taken daily. Today’s pills are safe and effective for most women, if taken as prescribed.

### Periodic Abstinence (Rhythm Method)
- **Periodic abstinence** methods consist of avoiding intercourse during the woman’s fertile period. A calendar, basal body temperature, or cervical mucus are used to identify the period in which the woman is most likely to become pregnant. Consult with your doctor on determining your fertile period.

### Breastfeeding
- **Breastfeeding**, like the rhythm method, is often considered a form of “natural family planning.” When a woman is nursing an infant, hormones are produced that inhibit ovulation and decrease the chance that she will become pregnant.

### Contraception in Islam

In Islam, the purpose of sexual behavior between husband and wife is not limited to procreation. Since often times the couple is not prepared to have children, Allah has made contraception permissible under certain guidelines. The Prophet (PBUH) did not prohibit contraception (the withdrawal method or coitus interruptus, which was practiced at the time). In almost every hadith and verse of the Holy Quran, the word is clear that conception is allowable, and that in the case of one who wishes to prevent pregnancy, Allah’s will prevails when He so ordains a matter such as conception.

Muslim scholars are not unanimous in their position regarding sterilization. To some, sterilization is prohibited since it alters God’s creation; they draw an analogy to the withdrawal method practiced by the Prophet (PBUH) at that time (coitus interruptus). In Iran, for example, Muslim clerics have ruled that sterilization is lawful. For those interested in this method, we suggest consulting with Muslim scholars who can explain the risks and benefits in detail.