

Australian women's knowledge of intrauterine devices (IUDs) for contraception

Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are the most effective forms of contraception available. Yet, results from the [2024 National Women's Health Survey \(NWHS\)](#) show that uptake is low and most Australian women report not knowing much about them. Even among those who say they know everything about IUDs, only around 1 in 3 correctly identified them as the most effective form of contraception.

What are IUDs?

Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are:

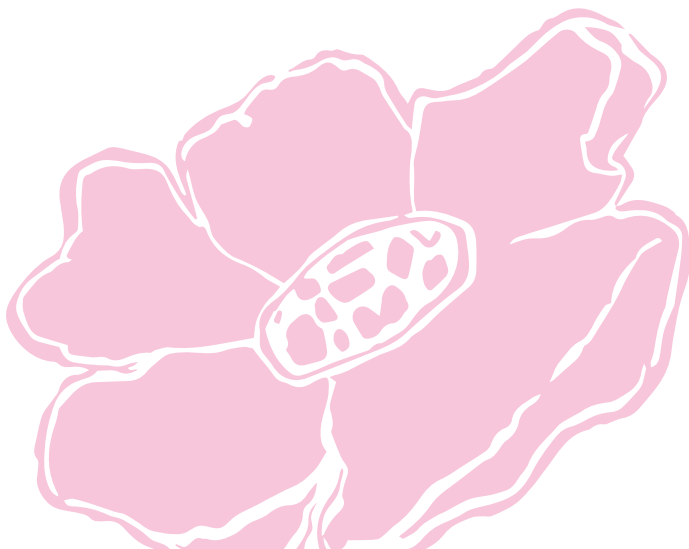
- small T-shaped devices inserted into the uterus to prevent pregnancy
- a type of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) that can be left in place for several years
- available in two types: hormonal IUDs that steadily release the hormone levonorgestrel to prevent ovulation, and copper IUDs that are toxic to sperm and make the uterine lining unsuitable for implantation of an embryo.¹

IUDs are the most effective form of contraception, preventing pregnancy in over **99%** of cases.

Why is it important to understand Australian women's knowledge of IUDs?

For women who want to avoid pregnancy, LARCs (including IUDs) are more effective and cost less over time than other contraceptive methods like condoms and the oral contraceptive pill.² IUDs also have other benefits, including not interfering with having sex, helping to manage heavy menstrual bleeding, and a similar or lower side-effect profile to more common methods such as the oral contraceptive pill.

The use of IUDs among women in Australia is low compared to use in similar countries overseas.³ In the 2024 NWHS, 7% of women aged 18 to 24 and 11% of women aged 25 to 44 reported currently using an IUD. Most were using the hormonal IUD, with only around 1% using the copper version.



Alongside psychological, social and economic factors, a person's knowledge about contraception contributes to their decision-making around whether to use contraception and which type(s) to use.⁴ To help inform the design of public health initiatives aimed at increasing the uptake of LARCs like IUDs, the 2024 NWHs assessed Australian women's perceived and actual knowledge of IUDs.

The use of IUDs among women in Australia is **low** compared to use in similar countries overseas.



Perceived knowledge of IUDs

Most women around reproductive age (18 to 50 years old) reported that they knew little or nothing about both the hormonal and copper IUD.

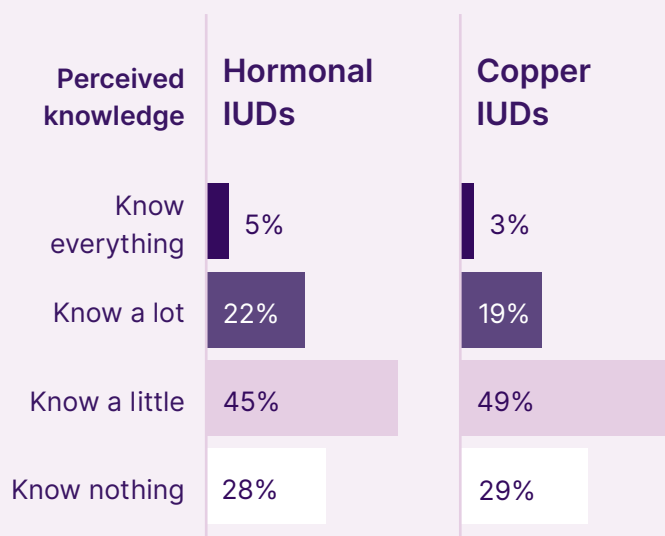


7 in 10 women

reported they knew nothing or only a little about **hormonal IUDs**

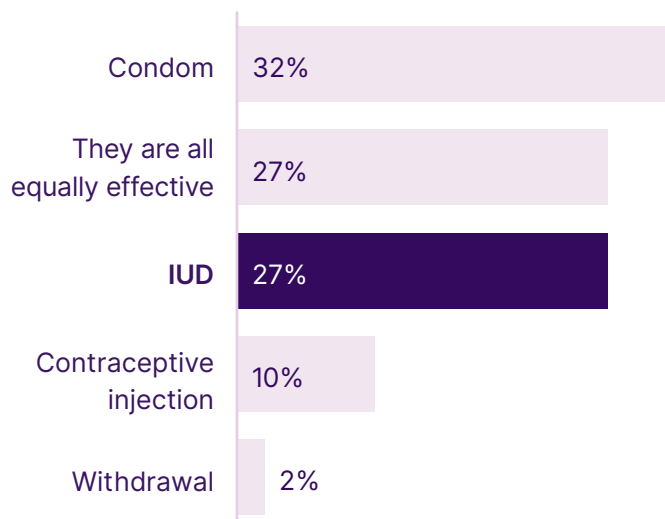
8 in 10 women

reported they knew nothing or only a little about **copper IUDs**



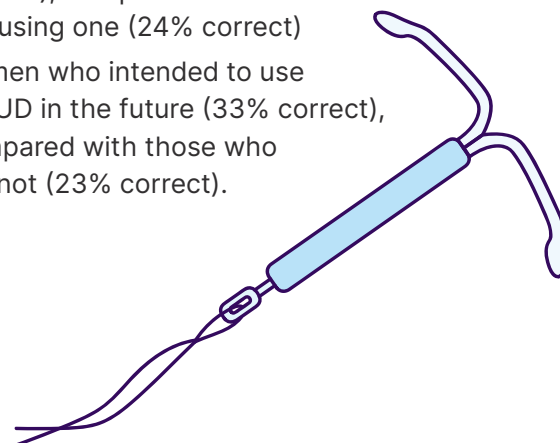
Tested knowledge about IUDs

We asked women which of the following methods was the best at preventing pregnancy. Around 1 in 4 (27%) correctly identified IUDs as the most effective method.



Knowledge about IUD effectiveness was higher among:

- younger women (36% of 18 to 24-year-olds, 26% of 25 to 44-year-olds, and 19% of 45 to 50-year-olds were correct)
- women currently using an IUD (50% correct), compared with those not using one (24% correct)
- women who intended to use an IUD in the future (33% correct), compared with those who did not (23% correct).



Even among those who said they knew everything about IUDs, only around

1 in 3 women

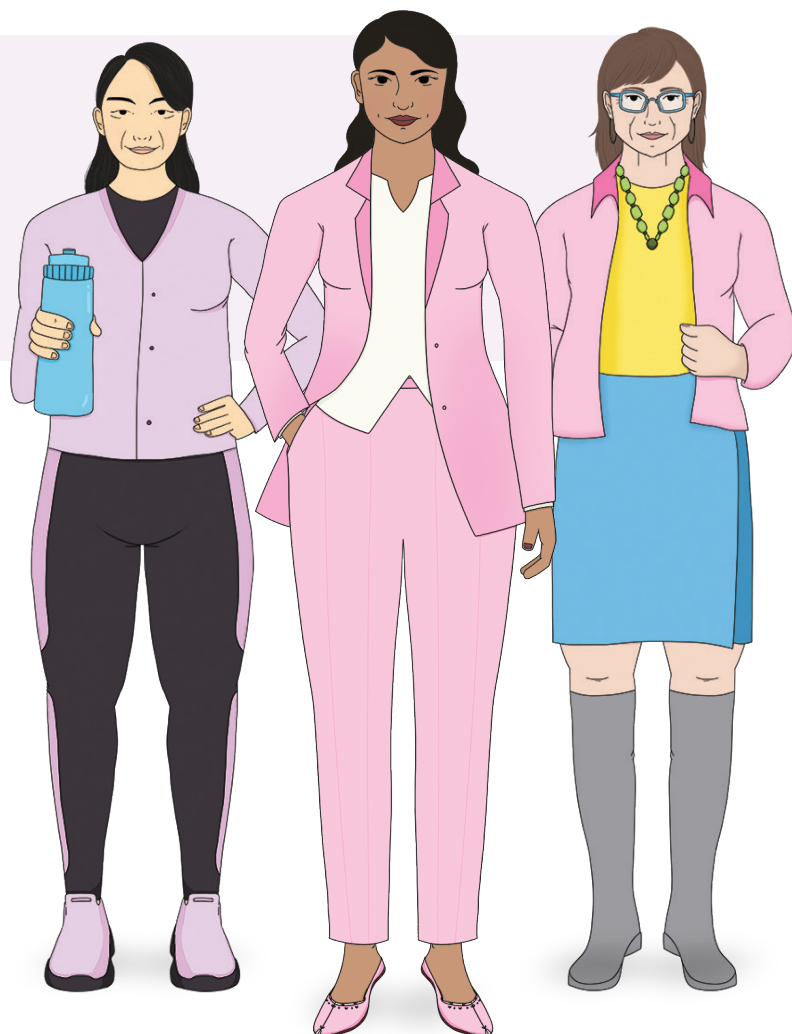
knew that IUDs were the most effective form of contraception.

Comparing perceived and tested knowledge about IUDs

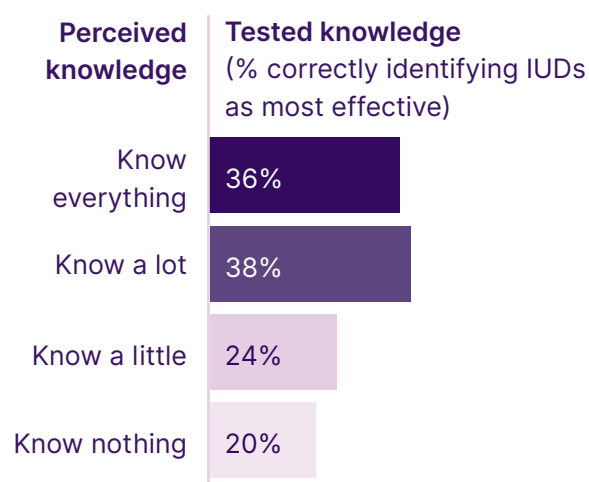
We compared women's perceptions of their own knowledge to their tested knowledge about the effectiveness of IUDs.

There was some alignment between perceived and tested knowledge. For both IUD types, women who said they knew a lot or everything were more likely than those who said they knew a little or nothing to correctly identify IUDs as the most effective method of contraception.

However, even among those who said they knew everything about either type of IUD, only around 1 in 3 knew that IUDs were the most effective form of contraception. This pattern was observed across age groups, suggesting that all women could benefit from initiatives to improve knowledge about IUDs.



Perceived versus tested knowledge of IUDs



So what?

- In Australia, knowledge about and use of IUDs is relatively low.
- Even women who say they know a lot or everything about IUDs have important gaps in their knowledge.
- Public health initiatives that aim to improve knowledge about IUDs are needed so that women can make informed choices about the best method of contraception for them.
- These initiatives need to be carefully designed to ensure they engage all women around reproductive age, including those who say they already know a lot or everything about IUDs.

References

- 1 FSRH Guideline (January 2019, amended October 2023). Combined Hormonal Contraception. *BMJ Sexual & Reproductive Health*, 45, Suppl 1. doi: 10.1136/bmj.srh-2018-CHC
- 2 Concepcion K, Lacey S, McGeechan K, Estoesta J, Bateson D, Botfield J. (2020). Cost-benefit analysis of enhancing the uptake of long-acting reversible contraception in Australia. *Australian Health Review* 44, 385-391. doi: 10.1071/AH18190
- 3 Grzeskowiak LE, Calabretto H, Amos N, Mazza D, Ilomaki J. (2021). Changes in use of hormonal long-acting reversible contraceptive methods in Australia between 2006 and 2018: A population-based study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 61(1), 128-34. doi: 10.1111/ajo.13257
- 4 D'Souza P, Bailey JV, Stephenson J, Oliver, S. (2022). Factors influencing contraception choice and use globally: A synthesis of systematic reviews. *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care*, 27(5), 364-372. doi: 10.1080/13625187.2022.2096215

About the National Women's Health Survey

The Jean Hailes National Women's Health Survey (NWHs) is an annual survey designed to help us better understand the issues that affect women in Australia, their attitudes and behaviours and the health information and policy changes that will help improve their health and wellbeing.

The NWHs is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

The 2024 NWHs explored Australian women's experiences, attitudes and beliefs related to pregnancy, abortion and contraception. It was conducted online in mid-2024 with a national, unselected sample, but only in English. A total of 3,537 women aged 18 to 50 years residing in Australia participated in the survey.

The 2024 NWHs was conducted in collaboration with the SPHERE Centre of Research Excellence.

For more information about the NWHs, see the technical report on the [Jean Hailes website](https://jeanhailes.org.au/technical-report).