

Contraception knowledge among Australian women in midlife

Women in midlife are an important but often overlooked audience for public health initiatives designed to improve contraception knowledge and use. Results from the 2024 National Women's Health Survey (NWHS) show that only around half of women aged 45 to 50 have good overall knowledge about contraception, and few know about long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs).

Background

The 2023 Senate inquiry into sexual and reproductive healthcare highlighted the need for better education around sexual and reproductive health, including contraception.¹ Women in midlife are often overlooked in the design of such initiatives but are an important audience for several reasons:

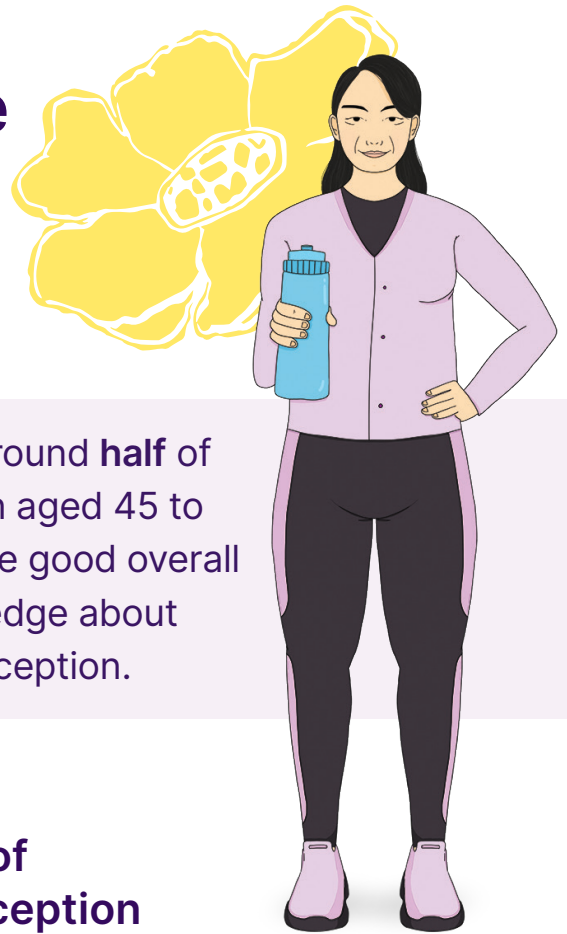
- Women who don't want to become pregnant need to continue using contraception until they reach menopause.²
- Women in midlife may be experiencing menopausal symptoms, and some hormonal contraceptives can help to manage those symptoms.³
- Many women in midlife play key roles in the health and wellbeing of their family and community. As such, they represent a trusted source of information for younger women on sexual and reproductive health issues. Research commissioned by Jean Hailes for Women's Health has shown that around half (46%) of women in Australia aged 18 to 25 ask their mother for information on contraception.⁴

Only around **half** of women aged 45 to 50 have good overall knowledge about contraception.

Types of contraception

To better understand what women in midlife know and think about contraception, the 2024 NWHS asked women aged 45 to 50 about a range of methods, including:

- condoms
- combined oral contraceptive pill ('the pill')
- progestogen-only oral contraceptive pill (the 'mini-pill')
- emergency contraceptive pill (the 'morning-after pill')
- contraceptive ring (NuvaRing)
- contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera)
- hormonal intrauterine device (hormonal IUD, also called Mirena or Kyleena)
- copper intrauterine device (non-hormonal IUD)
- contraceptive implant (Implanon)
- withdrawal method (pulling out before ejaculation)
- natural family planning (fertility awareness or rhythm method).



Perceived contraception knowledge

We asked women aged 45 to 50 to rate how much they know about each method of contraception: nothing, a little, a lot, or everything.

Most women (at least 7 in 10) said they know a lot or everything about condoms, the withdrawal method, and the pill. In contrast, 3 in 10 or fewer reported knowing a lot or everything about LARCs like IUDs and the contraceptive implant, injection, and ring.

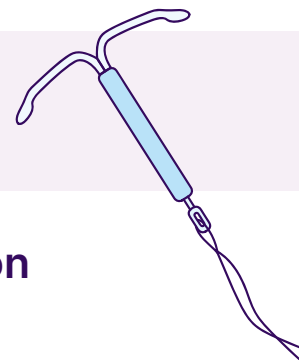


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7 in 10 women

said they know a lot or everything about condoms, the withdrawal method, and the pill.

Women knew the **least** about LARCs like IUDs.



Tested contraception knowledge

We also asked women 10 questions from the validated Contraceptive Knowledge Assessment⁵ to test their knowledge about the reproductive cycle and specific contraceptive methods.

Only around half (52%) had good overall knowledge, correctly answering 7 or more questions out of 10. Nearly 2 in 10 (16%) had poor overall knowledge, correctly answering fewer than half the questions.

Women knew the most about condoms and the withdrawal method, and the least about IUDs.

- Almost all women (9 in 10) correctly answered questions about condoms and the withdrawal method.
- Most (7 in 10) correctly answered questions about the reproductive cycle.
- Around half (5 in 10) correctly answered questions about how to access the emergency contraceptive pill and how long the vaginal ring can be used.
- Few (2 in 10) knew that IUDs were the most effective method of preventing pregnancy.

So what?

- Only around half of 45 to 50-year-old women in Australia have good overall knowledge about contraception, and a notable minority (nearly 2 in 10) have poor knowledge.
- Most women know about condoms, the pill, and the withdrawal method but many have key knowledge gaps around LARCs.
- Given the importance of contraception knowledge for women in midlife – both for their own needs and for advice they might provide within their family or community – it is essential that public health education campaigns include and engage them as a target audience.

References

- 1 Senate Community Affairs References Committee (2023). *Ending the postcode lottery: Addressing barriers to sexual, maternity and reproductive healthcare in Australia*. Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House: Canberra. Accessed May 1, 2025. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/ReproductiveHealthcare/Report
- 2 Soltes BA (2025). Contraception in perimenopause. *Menopause*. 32(5):472-474. doi:10.1097/GME.0000000000002554
- 3 Davis SR, Taylor S, Hemachandra C, et al. (2023). The 2023 Practitioner's Toolkit for Managing Menopause. *Climacteric*. 26(6):517-536. doi:10.1080/13697137.2023.2258783
- 4 The Evolved Group (2024). *Young people's information sources for sex, abortion and contraception*.
- 5 Haynes MC, Ryan N, Saleh M, Winkel AF, & Ades V. (2017). Contraceptive Knowledge Assessment: Validity and reliability of a novel contraceptive research tool. *Contraception*. 95(2):190-197. doi: 10.1016/j.contraception.2016.09.002

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. This report includes results from the 863 respondents aged 45 to 50 years old.

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://www.jeanhailes.org.au/technical-report).