

What is withdrawal?

Withdrawal is when the penis is removed from the vagina before ejaculation so that ejaculation takes place outside and away from the vagina. It also sometimes referred to as pulling out.

How effective is withdrawal?

Compared to other methods, withdrawal has a relatively high failure rate. It is about 80% effective at preventing pregnancy in typical use, which means that around 20 out of 100 people using it as their only form of birth control will get pregnant in one year. With consistent and correct use it can be higher. The effectiveness of withdrawal depends on the willingness and ability of the partners to use withdrawal with every act of intercourse.

Advantages of Withdrawal	Disadvantages of Withdrawal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and always available • No clinic visits necessary • No equipment or supplies needed • No side effects • A contraceptive method that people with penises can use • Can be combined with other methods of birth control to increase effectiveness (for example some people use birth control pills while also practicing withdrawal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as effective at preventing pregnancy as other birth control methods • Even if someone withdraws in time, pregnancy may still be possible because sperm may be present in pre-ejaculate (precum), the fluid that may come out as soon as the penis is erect • Relies on high commitment of the partner with a penis as well as cooperation and communication • May be difficult for some people to know when they need to withdraw and sometimes even people who are experienced in the method can withdraw too late • May not always be able to tell if it was used or used correctly • Worry about withdrawing on time may decrease enjoyment of sex • Interrupts intercourse • Little to no protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

How do I use the withdrawal method?

1. You must rely on what you are feeling to determine when you are about to ejaculate. This is a skill that can take experience and practice. Noticing these sensations during masturbation can help you be more aware of when they are happening during sex with a partner.
2. You must then withdraw the penis before ejaculation and move away from the vagina. Do not ejaculate on to the vulva (outside parts surrounding the vagina).
3. If another act of intercourse takes place, urinate (pee) and wipe the penis before you have sex again to reduce any sperm remaining from the previous ejaculation. There may still be sperm even if you do this, but it will reduce how much.

What if withdrawal doesn't happen soon enough?

If withdrawal didn't happen in time, ejaculate got onto the vulva (the outside parts of the vagina), or you used withdrawal instead of a more effective form of birth control method are concerned about getting pregnant, you could consider using emergency contraception. Learn more at www.optionsforsexualhealth.org

Questions? We're here for you!

We know it can be confusing to choose and use a method. We are here to help.

You can visit one of our Options for Sexual Health Clinics to speak with a health care provider. Our Sex Sense Team is available Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. by phone 1-800-739-7367 or by email at SexSense.org to answer your questions about birth control, or any other questions about sex, sexuality, or sexual health.

This fact sheet contains general information and should not be used in place of individual consultation with a qualified healthcare provider.