Implanon and Nexplanon: The contraceptive implant

Alice,

Can you tell me all you know about the contraceptive called Implanon and its effects on the body?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Kudos to you for seeking out more information about birth control methods; there are a great many options to choose from! To answer your question: Implanon is contraceptive implant that's injected underneath the skin of the upper arm by a health care provider. The small, rod-shaped implant slowly releases a progestogenic hormone called etonogestrel over the course of three years in order to provide long-lasting prevent pregnancy during that time. The etonogestrel works in three ways. First, it tricks the body into thinking it's pregnant, which prevents the ovaries from releasing eggs. It also thickens cervical mucus, making it difficult for sperm to enter the uterus. Lastly, it changes the lining of the uterus, preventing any egg that does happen to get fertilized from implanting itself in the uterine wall. What you may not have known is that Implanon's manufacturer, Merck, has made a few improvements on this method with a newer version called Nexplanon. It's virtually the same as Implanon, but has a few additional benefits (more on that in a bit). Both versions of the contraceptive implant are highly effective for most users, but may not be appropriate for everyone.

The rod (for both Implanon and Nexplanon) is 40 millimeters (mm) in length and two mm in diameter (about the size of a matchstick), and is made of a biodegradable synthetic (commonly used in artificial joints). Implanon and Nexplanon are similar in that each one is inserted relatively painlessly into the underside of the upper arm after local anesthetic is used to numb the area; the procedure takes about one minute. The one benefit that Nexplanon has that Implanon does not is that the former has an applicator that allows for one-handed insertion by the health care provider, increasing ease and decreasing time needed for the insertion. With either type, the devices are designed so that the rod isn't easily visible (unless a user is very thin), but can be felt just underneath the skin. Tissue forms around the rod after insertion to make sure that it doesn't move. Some users may experience slight swelling after insertion, but other issues are rare. The rod contains 68 milligrams of etonogestrel that is released over a three-year period. About 60 to 70 micrograms (µg) per day are released in the first year and the amount decreases over time until only about 25 to 0 µg per day are released in the third year. After the third year, the implant will continue to release some hormone, but it
The contraceptive implant isn't for everyone. It is possible that Implanon and Nexplanon are not as effective in individuals who are overweight or obese. Because the amount of hormones released through the implanted rod is the same across the board, individuals who are overweight or obese may not receive enough relative to body size to prevent pregnancy. However, obese women have not yet been included in Implanon and Nexplanon studies. Because more evidence on this topic is needed, talking with a health care provider about whether or not Implanon or Nexplanon would be appropriate to use, given a potential user's health history, is especially crucial. Additionally, individuals who have a hormone-dependent cancer, active thrombosis, or severe liver disease are advised to consider contraceptive options other than Implanon or Nexplanon. For even more information about birth control options, check out the Go Ask Alice! Contraception category in the Sexual & Reproductive Health archive.

Alice!
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