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I need free birth control! Please? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

My boyfriend and I have a really close relationship. I do not have insurance yet, and I absolutely need contraception. Where can I go or who can I call for free contraception? Please help!!!

— No Money for Birth Control

Answer

Dear No Money for Birth Control,

Some of the best things in life — like sex! — may be free... but enjoying those activities to the fullest may mean investing at least some of your time or money in putting safety first. You can be sure, though, that putting in these resources to prevent unwanted pregnancy (not to mention sexually transmitted infections) will be a wise investment. That being said, there *are* many resources available to help allay the cost of contraception, especially under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) ^[2], which has been a major player in reducing barriers to many sexual health services.

Since the ACA went into effect, many Americans are getting health insurance more easily. But another perk to the ACA is that many health insurance plans (private or Medicare/Medicaid) cover contraception and sexual health services at no additional cost to you. These services include a range of contraceptive methods approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), such as the pill, emergency contraception ^[3], IUDs ^[4], implants, and sterilization, as well as screenings for cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), prenatal counseling, and sexual health education. Whew — talk about a lot of freebies! The one hiccup, though, is that every insurance plan manages these benefits a little differently. Some plans may require you to pay upfront and then will reimburse you later; other plans have only a small number of providers who you can visit; and still, others may be exempt from providing coverage for these services (e.g., some plans offered through religiously-affiliated organizations). If you do decide to pursue health insurance coverage, it's worth investigating what coverage is offered for sexual health benefits within the plans for which you're eligible.

Though insurance coverage for contraception under the ACA provides more benefits, insurance isn't your only option for finding free or low-cost contraceptives. You may consider these avenues

to locate affordable safer sex tools:

- Your local [Planned Parenthood](#) [5] or similar family planning health center may offer free or affordable options, or they may be able to help you enroll in an insurance plan that would give you access to all those free benefits. Many of these types of health centers and clinics are able to offer birth control on a sliding-fee scale, meaning the price you pay for services is based on your income.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also provides health clinics that can help you get birth control at a reduced price, although perhaps not for free. Their [online database](#) [6] can help you find a clinic in your area.
- Consider chatting with your partner about splitting the cost of birth control — putting two pennies toward prevention is always better than one!
- Finally, many local health departments, universities, or primary care offices distribute some types of contraceptives — typically condoms and other non-prescription barrier methods — at no cost in their waiting areas. Often, all you have to do is ask!

One key question to ask yourself as you decide which route to take is what you're looking for in your safer sex strategy. While some options, like oral contraceptives or an IUD, only protect against unwanted pregnancy, other options, like male and female condoms, have the added bonus of protecting against many sexually transmitted infections. You may also need to consider potential side effects of certain methods or whether some methods are advised due to any pre-existing conditions. Consulting with a health care provider can help you narrow down the best safer sex options for you, based on your current health status, healthy history, and your budget. You can also browse Q&As in the *Go Ask Alice!* [Contraception](#) [7] category in the [Sexual and Reproductive Health](#) [8] archives to get a sense of all the contraceptive and safer sex strategies available to you.

Alice!

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Related questions

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Published date:

May 02, 2008

Last reviewed on:

Apr 15, 2016

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