What are the disadvantages of DMPA as a method of contraception?

- DMPA changes bleeding/period patterns. These changes are a result of the hormonal effect to the lining of the uterus. It is not possible to predict which changes will occur, but they can include:
  - most commonly, periods stop completely after the first or second injections
  - irregular or spot bleeding
  - prolonged bleeding (this is usually light, however can cause inconvenience to women)
  - heavy bleeding (rare)
- does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- possible delay in return to fertility; on average, the delay is about 9 months from when the last DMPA injection is given
- Studies have shown that more than 80% of women trying to conceive were pregnant within 1 year of stopping DMPA and within 2 years, 90% were pregnant. This is comparable with women who have not used DMPA, where 90% are pregnant within 1 year.

What are the possible health benefits of DMPA?

- many women will have no periods or minimal bleeding only, with reduced discomfort or pain
- can be used to manage painful periods, endometriosis or premenstrual symptoms (PMS)
- reduces chance of anaemia caused by heavy periods
- reduces the risk of cancer of the uterus
What do I need to know about starting DMPA?

Starting DMPA for the first time requires an assessment by a doctor and a prescription.

This assessment enables you to ask any questions you may have and to be certain that it is the most suitable method for you.

The first injection of DMPA is usually given during the first five days of a period to ensure the woman is not pregnant. In some cases condoms will need to be used for seven days after the first injection. It is very important that there is no chance of an early pregnancy at the time of injection as this may lead to a delay in the diagnosis of a pregnancy.

What do I need to know about the ongoing use of DMPA?

Follow up DMPA injections are given every 12 weeks to continue protection against pregnancy. If you go beyond 12 weeks from your last injection you may be at risk of pregnancy. If you aren’t certain what to do, seek further advice as soon as possible, particularly if you think you may need Emergency Contraception.

To renew your DMPA prescription you will need to see a doctor for review once a year. A review of risks for loss of bone density (osteoporosis) will take place at this visit.

Where is DMPA available?

DMPA is available on prescription and can be obtained from Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) clinics or your general practitioner (GP).

What are the possible side effects of DMPA?

DMPA has few side effects. However, side effects may include:

- small weight gain in some women
- headaches
- acne
- change in sexual interest
- mood changes

The injection is long acting and if side effects occur they may last up to 3 months (it is not possible to reverse the effects of an injection once it is given).

What are the possible risks associated with DMPA?

- DMPA use is associated with a slight loss of bone density while using the method. Research indicates:
  - this loss is largely reversible once DMPA use finishes
  - for women in their teenage years or early twenties, this loss is occurring at a time when bone mass normally is increasing
  - that diet and exercise are other important influences on bone mass in young women
  - that there is no evidence of an increase in fractures in women who have used DMPA
- Studies are continuing on the long term effects of a loss of bone density associated with use of DMPA.

Is DMPA suitable for all women?

Most women can safely use DMPA. Your doctor will review the suitability of the method with you prior to commencing use. In assessing your suitability, consideration is given to a number of important factors in your medical history:

- breast cancer
- liver disease
- heart disease, high blood pressure, blood clotting disorders or stroke
- diabetes
- low bone density
- unexplained vaginal bleeding (this should be investigated before using DMPA)

If your general health changes, the suitability of this method should be reassessed.

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