



**Reproductive Health  
in Nursing**

**Definitions &  
Orienting Facts**

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# **Postpartum Contraception in Unintended Pregnancy and Prevention Care**

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# Definitions

**Early Pregnancy Decision-Making:** Refers to the decision-making process that a woman engages in when faced with an unintended pregnancy. Pregnancy options include continuing the pregnancy with the intention to parent, continuing the pregnancy with the intention to adopt, or choosing abortion care.

**Emergency Contraception:** A contraceptive method used after intercourse to prevent a pregnancy.

**Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM):** A natural, temporary method of contraception based on the concept that lactation postpones ovulation in the postpartum period. LAM can be up to 99% effective if the mother is breastfeeding exclusively with no supplementation, is not gone for long periods of the day or night between feedings, menses have not returned and baby is less than 6 months old.

**Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives:** LARCs refer to methods of contraception that can last for several years. Examples are intrauterine devices (which range from 3-12 years) or a hormonal implant (3 years). Some people also consider the hormonal injection (which lasts for 3 months) to be a LARC.

**Medication Abortion:** This method of early abortion is currently used up to 70 days of pregnancy in the U.S. The most commonly used regimen includes mifepristone (formerly known as RU486) followed by misoprostol. Generally a woman has an appointment with a provider for mifepristone after which she self-administers misoprostol in 1-3 days at home. Within a few hours, she has miscarriage-like symptoms of cramping and then passes the pregnancy.

**Preconception Health:** This refers to the health of women and men during their reproductive years, which are the years they can have a child. It focuses on taking steps to protect the health of a baby they might have sometime in the future. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) offers detailed information to assist individuals in developing a reproductive life plan and to health care professionals to support this planning.

**Unintended Pregnancy:** An unintended pregnancy is a pregnancy that is mistimed, unplanned, or unwanted at the time of conception.

# Orienting Facts

- According to the CDC, family planning is one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century. Family planning methods have provided a means for women to delay a first pregnancy, achieve interconceptional birth spacing, and attain an ideal family size.
- The Guttmacher Institute reports that “the average American woman spends about five years pregnant, postpartum or trying to become pregnant, and three decades—more than three-quarters of her reproductive life—trying to avoid an unintended pregnancy.”
- The Guttmacher Institute also reports that births resulting from unintended or closely spaced pregnancies are associated with adverse maternal and child health outcomes such as delayed prenatal care, premature birth and negative physical and mental health effects for children.
- Healthy People provides science-based, 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. For three decades, Healthy People has established benchmarks and monitored progress to identify nationwide health improvement priorities. Healthy People strives to increase public awareness and understanding of the determinants of health, disease, and disability and the opportunities for progress. They provide measurable objectives and goals that are applicable at the national, state, and local levels as well as engaging multiple sectors to take actions to strengthen policies and improve practices that are driven by the best available evidence and knowledge and identifies critical research, evaluation, and data collection needs.
- Healthy People Goals for 2020 include improving pregnancy planning and spacing, and prevention of unintended pregnancy.
- Healthy People Goals for 2020 support breastfeeding for all infants. The goal for 2020 is 82% of all new mothers will breastfeed for 3-6 months.
- Unintended pregnancies occur frequently in the U.S. According to Finer and Zolna (2014) half of pregnancies among American women are unintended, and four in 10 of these are terminated by abortion. Given this statistic, a woman might not be aware of a pregnancy until fetal development has progressed into the vulnerable period (17-56 days after conception). During this period the fetus is vulnerable to developing birth defects such as neural tube defects, major brain anomalies, heart defects, limb deficiencies, and various ear and eye defects. Exposure to prescription drugs that are known to cause birth defects, or hazardous substances in the workplace or home can have detrimental effects.