

LARC ONLINE: WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT INTRAUTERINE DEVICES AND CONTRACEPTIVE IMPLANTS ARE AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET?

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Background:

Many people make decisions about what contraceptive method they would like to use before consulting a healthcare provider. The internet is a key source of this information, however the information provided online is not always accurate and may perpetuate myths and misperceptions about certain methods. As more people utilize the methods collectively referred to as long-acting reversible contraception (LARC), including intrauterine devices and contraceptive implants, it is essential that the information available about them online is accessible and accurate. This study aimed to examine the information available online about LARC during a Google search.

Methods:

A scoping review of websites returned during a Google search for LARC was conducted. Terms relating to intrauterine devices and contraceptive implants were entered into Google and the first three pages of results were downloaded. All pages were reviewed for their content relating to LARC and assessed using the DISCERN guidelines for health consumer information.

Results:

After duplicates were removed, 359 pages were subject to review. Results spanned medical factsheets from reputable organizations (for example, Family Planning NSW and Better Health Channel Victoria), to news articles about LARC. The content and quality of the pages varied. Results suggest that although information regarding the procedure, the mechanism of action and contraceptive effectiveness are often provided, information about the procedure required for removal, the cost of insertion and removal and where to access these services is missing. Information regarding other contraceptive options were not often provided. News articles and blogs sometimes perpetuated the idea that using LARC is unusual, while similarly emphasizing their superior contraceptive effectiveness when compared to other methods.

Conclusion:

Ensuring that the information regarding LARC provided online is not only accurate but encompasses all aspects of their use – including cost and the procedure for insertion and removal – will facilitate informed contraceptive decision making.

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