



CYCLE WISE

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WITHDRAWAL: YES, IT'S LEGIT!

Often called the “pull and pray” method, withdrawal has a bad rap in most of our minds. However, withdrawal can be an effective method of contraception, whether used on its own or used as part of your overall birth control strategy (for example, in conjunction with condoms, FAM, or a diaphragm). And yes, withdrawal does count as a birth control method – is is not using “nothing”!

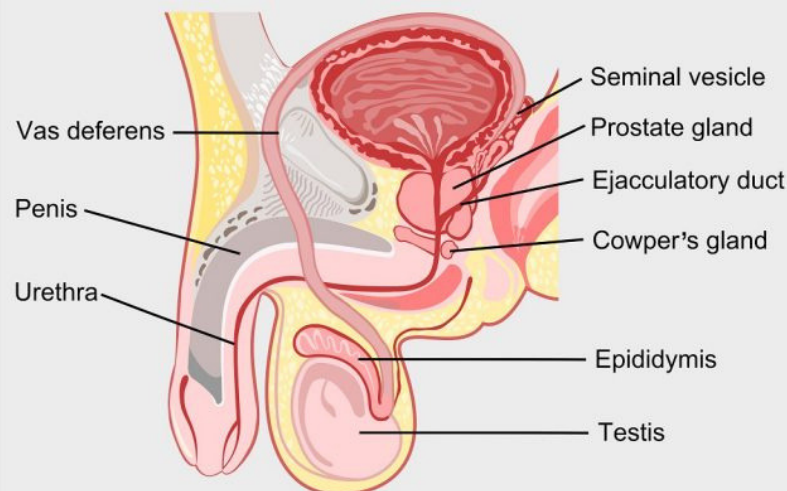
Let's look at how to use withdrawal successfully, and what causes it to fail.

Withdrawal simply means withdrawing, or pulling out, the penis from the vagina before ejaculation occurs. Pre-cum, the fluid secreted from the penis during arousal prior to ejaculation, is often blamed for causing unintended pregnancies due to its supposed sperm content.

Pre-cum, also known as pre-fluid, is produced in the Cowper's Gland underneath the Prostate Gland inside the male reproductive system. It travels down the urethra when arousal occurs, often exiting the tip of the penis, so that the urethra is lubricated and alkaline for the passage of sperm. Normally the urethra is quite acidic from urine, so the Cowper's Gland fluid creates a much more hospitable environment.

Does this pre-fluid contain live sperm? The short answer is, sometimes! From the limited studies we have, it seems that some men *always* have a small amount of live sperm in their pre-fluid, while some men never do. It doesn't appear that men sometimes have live sperm in their fluid; they either do or they don't. However, the studies conclude that the amount of sperm found in pre-cum is equivalent to subfertile men who cannot cause a pregnancy.*

Male Reproductive Tract



Another reason why pre-cum may contain live sperm is that some sperm stay in the urethra after ejaculation and don't get flushed out with urine. Let's say your partner ejaculates at 5:00 PM, doesn't pee, then gets aroused again at 7:00 PM. Every time arousal occurs, the Cowper's Gland creates its fluid that moves into the urethra and often out the tip of the penis, becoming a channel for fresh sperm to hang out in. If your partner is inside of you and they didn't pee after their previous orgasm, those live sperm may be carried on the pre-fluid into the vagina, even if your partner withdraws.

How to use withdrawal correctly:

- **Practice:** Your partner has to know their own body! Do they have a 10-second warning for when orgasm is about to happen? Does it take them by surprise? Can they stop “on command?” Practice is ESSENTIAL! Your partner can practice on their own, where they get to know their limits and gain awareness and control of their orgasm; or, they can practice during intercourse as long as you're in your luteal phase when there is no pregnancy risk (you'll know when this is if you chart your cycles using Fertility Awareness).
- **Pee:** There is plenty of live sperm left over in the urethra after ejaculation. Peeing afterwards is necessary to flush out the urethra (rinsing off the penis wouldn't hurt either) before it's safe to use withdrawal during intercourse.
- **Partnership:** Have you discussed the how-to's of this method with your partner? Have you read over this handout together? Have you talked about your intentions for avoiding pregnancy? How's your trust? Have you discussed what you would do if withdrawal failed? Do you have a back-up plan in case it failed? (The above are important discussion points for ALL methods of birth control, in fact, since **all methods can fail!**)

Effectiveness: Withdrawal is 97% effective with perfect use (meaning humans make no errors), and 75% effective with typical use (meaning humans make mistakes). (*Contraceptive Technology*)

Remember, your fertile phase only lasts about 5 – 12 days each cycle, so using withdrawal every time you have intercourse is not necessary. For most of your cycle you can't get pregnant anyway. Charting your cycles with Fertility Awareness shows you exactly when you can and can't get pregnant.

IMPORTANT: Withdrawal is not a safe choice if you or your partner don't know your STI status; if you or your partner has an STI; or if either of you are at risk for an STI.

*<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3564677/>

*<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12286905>