Q: What is an intrauterine device?
A: An intrauterine device (IUD) is a type of birth control. It is a small, T-shaped device that a doctor or nurse practitioner inserts through the vagina and cervix into the uterus. These devices are made of flexible plastic.

It is one of the safest, most effective methods for preventing pregnancy. If you are not intending on becoming pregnant for at least one year it is a good choice.

IUD’s can also be used for other reasons. One type can be used to treat heavy, painful periods. The other type can be used to prevent pregnancy if it is put in within 5 days after a woman has sex without birth control. This is known as “emergency contraception.”

Q: What are the different types of IUDs?
A: There are 2 types of IUDs. One type releases copper; the other releases the hormone progestin.

• Copper-releasing IUD – There is only 1 copper-releasing IUD. It is called Paragard and can stay in your uterus for up to 10 years to prevent pregnancy. Some women who use it get heavier or longer periods than they had before getting the IUD. Paragard also can be used for emergency contraception.
• Progestin-releasing IUD – There are 2 progestin-releasing IUDs, called Mirena and Skyla. Mirena can stay in your uterus for up to 5 years to prevent pregnancy. Skyla can stay in place for up to 3 years. Many women who use progestin-releasing IUDs have lighter, less painful periods than they had before getting the IUD. Some women stop getting a period at all. But this is not harmful and does not need to be treated. Regular periods return when the IUD is removed.

Q: What are the benefits of using an IUD?
A: These include:

• IUDs are very effective. Fewer than 1 in 100 women who use them get pregnant during the first year of using them.
• You do not have to remember to do anything or take any birth control pills on a regular basis.
• IUDs have few side effects.
• IUDs do not contain estrogen, a hormone that some women can’t or don’t want to take.
• If you decide you want to get pregnant, you can have the IUD taken out.

Q: What are the downsides of an IUD?
A: These include:

• Unlike condoms, an IUD does not protect you against sexually transmitted diseases or “STDs.” But your partner can use a condom to protect against transmitting infection.
• There is a small chance the IUD will come out during your period. If this happens, you will need a new IUD.
• The initial cost is higher than the cost of other methods. But there is no cost for 3 to 10 years after the initial cost. However, if you have health insurance this is considered a preventive form of health care and it should be covered by your plan beginning January 1, 2014 if it isn’t already.
• Only a doctor or nurse practitioner can insert or remove an IUD.

Q: Which type of IUD is best for me?
A: Your nurse practitioner or doctor can help you choose the right IUD for you. Paragard might be a good choice if you:

• Want or need to avoid hormones. This includes women who have had blood clots in their legs.
• Want to avoid big changes in your period, such as not having any periods at all or bleeding or spotting when you might not expect it.
• Want birth control for up to 10 years.

Mirena or Skyla might be a good choice if you:
• Have heavy, painful periods. Mirena and Skyla can make your periods lighter and less painful.
• Want birth control for up to 5 years.

Q: Does it hurt to have an IUD put in?

A: You will likely feel some discomfort and cramping during and after the IUD is inserted for about a day. Women who have not had a baby often feel more discomfort than women who have had a baby.

After the IUD is in place, you should not be able to feel it.

Q: Does the UAF Health Center provide this service?

A: We do not insert IUDs but we can remove them. Planned Parenthood and Tanana Valley Clinic are just two among other clinics in Fairbanks that can insert IUDs for women.