How the IUD works:

An IUD/IUS (intrauterine device or intrauterine system) is a small plastic device that is inserted into your uterus by a trained doctor or health care provider. When it is in place, the IUD/IUS appears to work primarily by stopping sperm from reaching the egg. It can also stop a fertilized egg from implanting into the uterine lining.

Two types of IUDs are available in the United States. The copper IUD (ParaGard®) causes a change in uterine and tubal fluids so that the egg does not get fertilized. The Progestin IUS (Mirena®) has a hormonal method of action: the cervical mucus thickens, preventing the sperm from getting into the uterus and reaching the egg.

How to use the IUD:

IUD/IUS insertion is done by a specially trained doctor or health care provider. The IUD/IUS can be inserted at any time during the menstrual cycle. Ask your health care provider for more information. The IUD/IUS can be inserted after childbirth, or within three weeks of an abortion. Ask your health care provider for more information about the timing of insertion.
You should check regularly to see that your IUD is still in place. You should be taught how to check for the string before leaving the clinic after insertion.

**Effectiveness:**
Intrauterine contraception provides highly-effective, long-term protection against pregnancy. One woman in 1,000 will get pregnant with the Mirena IUS in the first year, and six women in 1,000 will get pregnant with the ParaGard IUD (perfect use – if they check the strings regularly to see if the IUD/IUS is still in place).

**Benefits of the IUD:**
The IUD/IUS offers long-term protection. Both types offer protection against ectopic pregnancy and may protect against uterine cancer as well. IUD/IUS users are more satisfied with their method of birth control than users of any other method. Fertility returns immediately after the IUD/IUS is removed.

**Potential side effects and disadvantages:**
Menstrual periods (bleeding) may be longer, although women who use the Mirena IUS report a decrease in blood flow. Some women may get anemic when they bleed heavily. Spotting may occur between periods. Other women may experience lighter periods or no periods at all. Menstrual cramping may increase. Women who have never been pregnant may be more likely to experience discomfort during insertion. It is very important to talk with a trained doctor or health care provider about potential side effects with either the IUD or IUS.

The insertion of an IUD/IUS may be more uncomfortable if you have never been pregnant, because the opening to your uterus is smaller. The IUD/IUS can be inserted at any time during your menstrual cycle (you do not need to be bleeding), but your health care provider will need to rule out any possibility that you might be pregnant.

Using the IUD or IUS will not give you protection against HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, herpes, genital warts, gonorrhea, hepatitis B and syphilis.

**Potential risks:**
Large, recent studies show that the IUD itself appears to have no effect on risk of infection in the tubes (pelvic inflammatory disease, or PID). The insertion process can introduce infection from the vagina into the uterus, and the risk of PID is limited to the first 20 days after insertion. Untreated or recurring PID can lead to infertility (difficulty getting pregnant).