

Birth Control Pills

UR Medicine Ob/Gyn

What are birth control pills? Birth control pills, also called oral contraceptives (OCPs), are taken every day to prevent pregnancy.

How do birth control pills work?

Pills are made from the female hormones, estrogen and progesterone. These hormones work by stopping your ovary from releasing an egg each month. They also make your cervical mucus thicker, stopping sperm from getting to the egg. They do not protect against STDs.

How effective are pills?

When BCPs are used perfectly, only 1 in 100 women will get pregnant in one year. However, since no one is perfect at taking pills every day, there is a 9% risk of getting pregnant in a year while using the pill.

What may be done before I start using birth control pills?

Your doctor will ask you about diseases and illnesses you have had in the past and check your blood pressure. A pelvic exam is not needed unless you are having a problem.

Your doctor will ask about medicines that you use, and should ask you if you smoke. Smoking increases your chances of having a stroke, a heart attack, or a blood clot in your lungs. If you smoke and are 35 years or older, you should not take certain kinds of pills.

Do not use this medicine if you have breast or uterine cancer, liver disease, or certain types of headache (migraines with aura). You should not use the estrogen-containing pills if you have ever had a blood clot, heart attack, or stroke.

What are the types of birth control pills? The different types of OCPs include monophasic, multiphasic, progesterone-only, low-dose, and extended cycle OCPs. They have different amounts of estrogen and progesterone, side effects, risks, and schedules for taking them.

- **Monophasic birth control pills:** These pills have the same amount of estrogen and progesterone in each active pill. They may help prevent sudden changes in your mood or feelings caused by changing hormone levels.
- **Multiphasic birth control pills:** The level of hormones in these pills change like those in your body through the month. Each pill has different amounts of estrogen and progesterone depending on the day they will be taken. This helps you get the right amount of hormones and helps prevent any unwanted side effects.
- **Progesterone-only birth control pills:** These pills only contain progesterone, which prevents ovulation and thickens cervical mucus to block sperm. They may cause less side effects than other pills, and are safer for women with medical problems such as high blood pressure or blood clots.
- **Extended cycle or Continuous pills:** these pills contain active pills for 3 months in a row – meaning you get period every 3 months instead of every month.

How do I take my birth control pills?

Start taking your pills on the first day of your period, or on the first Sunday after your period begins. If you start your first pill after your period, you may need a backup method for



one week. You can also ask your provider about a “Quick Start” method when you can start taking the pills right away.

Progesterone-only pills can be used immediately after having a baby and while breastfeeding. Regular pills can be started 4-6 weeks after having a baby and while breastfeeding.

Take one pill from the pack every day. The last four to seven pills in the 28-day pack are usually a different color than the rest of the pills. You may start a new pack after finishing the old one.

Pick a time of the day that is easy for you to take your pills. Taking them at the same time every day may help prevent bleeding, and makes you less likely to get pregnant.

If you miss **one** pill, take it as soon as you remember. Continue taking the remaining pills at your usual time. If you miss **two** pills in a row, take one as soon as you remember. Continue taking the remaining pills at your usual time. If you miss **three** pills in a row, call your provider. You may have to stop that pack of pills, wait for your period, and start a new pack. Use a backup method to prevent pregnancy. You may also need to take emergency contraception (EC) if you have been having unprotected sex and missed three pills, especially if they were missed at the beginning of the pack.

What are the advantages of using birth control pills?

Birth control pills may help decrease bleeding and pain during your monthly period. They may also help prevent cancer of the uterus, ovaries and colon. They can also prevent ovarian cysts.

What are the disadvantages or side effects of using birth control pills?

You must remember to take a pill every day, which can be inconvenient and difficult to do for some people.

Most women do not have any side effects. You may have sudden changes in your mood when taking pills. You may also have bleeding in between periods, less frequent periods, vaginal dryness, and breast pain. Birth control pills with estrogen put you at a small increased risk for blood clots and stroke, especially if you smoke and are older than 35. However, you are much more likely to have a blood clot or stroke during pregnancy than when you take a birth control pill.

What medications interact with birth control pills?

Some antibiotics (rifampin or rifabutin). Most antibiotics do NOT interfere.

Some anti-seizure medications, but not all of them

Certain HIV medications, but not all of them

If you are found to be pregnant while you are taking birth control pills, they DO NOT cause abortion, miscarriage or birth defects.

How much do pills cost?

Depending on your insurance, pills may cost \$9-60 per month. However, your insurance may be able to cover the cost completely.

You can find more information about birth control pills here:

www.bedsider.org

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/birth-control-pill-4228.ht>