

Birth Control Pills (combination contraceptive pills)

How pills work:

Combination hormone pills stop your body from releasing an egg, so that there is no egg present to be fertilized. The hormones also cause the cervical mucus (liquid at the opening of the uterus) to thicken, which can stop sperm from getting into the uterus.

How to use the pills:

Take one pill every day at about the same time every day. For instructions on how to begin taking your pills, ask your doctor or health care provider. If you miss any pills, you may be at risk for pregnancy. Ask your doctor or health care provider for specific instructions.

Effectiveness:

About 3 women in 1,000 (99.7% effectiveness) will get pregnant in one year if they take their pills every day and at the same time every day (perfect use). If you miss any pills, or don't take them at the same time every day (typical use), your chance of pregnancy goes up. If you are taking some other medications, the pills can be less effective.

Benefits of the pill:

Many women report regular and lighter periods with fewer cramps and PMS symptoms, as well as a clearer complexion when taking some types of pills. Pills provide protection against ovarian cancer, uterine cancer, colo-rectal cancer, benign breast disease, ovarian cysts and iron deficiency. Taking pills does not interrupt sex. If you want to get pregnant, you can become pregnant immediately after you stop taking the pill.

Potential side effects and disadvantages:

Most modern pills have a lower dose of hormones and cause fewer side effects, such as spotting between periods, mild nausea or breast tenderness. Side effects usually don't last long and go away with a change in pill type. Ask your provider about side effects before you quit the pill. Recent research has shown that weight gain or loss is not caused by the pill. Using birth control pills will not give you protection against HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

Potential risks:

Some women should not take pills if they have specific health conditions, including some types of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Ask your doctor or health care provider about your risks. Cigarette smoking increases the risk of serious cardiovascular side effects (blood clots, heart attacks, strokes), especially for women over 35. Women who use birth control pills are strongly advised not to smoke.

Where can you get pills?

Birth control pills require a prescription from a doctor or qualified health care provider. Call your local family planning clinic for information.

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GENERAL REFERENCE: Contraceptive Technology: 18th Rev. Ed., 2004