

Facts About Oral Contraceptives

What are oral contraceptives?

Oral contraceptives, or “the pill,” are tablets taken once a day to prevent pregnancy. The pill has been available since the 1960’s, and since that time, several changes have occurred over time. One major change has been the reduction in the dose of the hormones, estrogen and progestin. It is believed that lowering these doses has helped to decrease the occurrence of serious side effects, as well as the occurrence of minor, but annoying, side effects, such as nausea and bloating.

How do they work?

Commonly used oral contraceptives contain estrogen and progestin, substances that act like natural hormones in the body. These substances work together to prevent the ovary from releasing an egg each month. Since pregnancy can only occur if an egg and sperm meet, a woman should not get pregnant when taking the pill.

How effective is the pill?

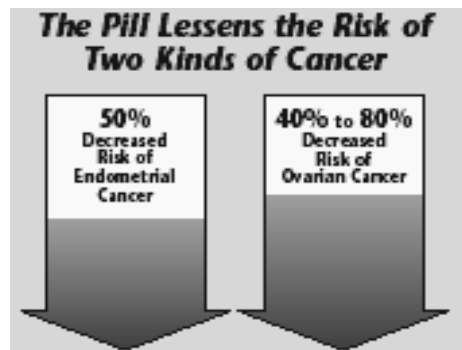
When taken correctly, oral contraceptives are one of the most effective birth control methods. When used correctly, the chance of becoming pregnant is about 1%.

Are they safe?

Today’s oral contraceptives are very safe. In fact, for most women it is far safer to take the pill than it is to deliver a baby. Ongoing research suggests, among healthy pill users who do not smoke, there appears to be no increased risk of heart attack and stroke. As for cancer, taking the pill does not increase your risk of getting cancer over a lifetime—it actually protects you against certain cancers.

What are the side effects?

Taking the pill may cause minor side effects that vary from woman to woman. For some women, small amounts of bleeding may occur between periods. This effect is not harmful and usually disappears after the third month on the pill. Another temporary side effect is nausea—some women may have upset stomachs after taking the pill during the first month or so. Taking the pill just before you go to bed can help control this problem. As for weight changes, most pill-users have no weight changes at all. Although some women gain weight taking the pill, an equal number actually lose weight. Weight gain or loss is more likely caused by changes in diet than by taking the pill. Other possible side effects reported in women include breast tenderness, headache, mood changes, and decreased sex drive.



What about STDs and AIDS?

It is important to keep in mind that oral contraceptives will not protect against getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Women should use condoms in addition to the pill to help protect against STDs and HIV.

What are the Benefits?

Aside from being a very effective birth control method; the pill has many health-related benefits. Pill use protects against two types of cancer—cancer of the ovary and cancer of the lining of the womb. The pill also protects against non-cancerous cysts that can form in the breast. Women who use the pill are less likely to have cramps and pain during their periods. They also tend to have lighter periods with fewer days of bleeding.

How do I know the pill is right for me?

You **should not** use the Pill if you have had, now have, or may develop in the future: blood clots in the veins or arteries, serious liver disease, a heart attack or certain types of stroke, or cancer of the breast, uterus, or liver. You **should not** use the Pill if you smoke cigarettes and are age 35 or older. There may be less protection from pregnancy when the Pill is taken with certain drugs, especially those used to control seizures. Your clinician can give you more information and help you decide if the pill is right for you.

FACTS ABOUT THE PILL

You may have heard:

The truth is:

<i>The pill will make me gain weight.</i>	<i>The pill does not make you fat. Lack of exercise and overeating cause weight gain. Most women who take the pill do not experience a change in weight.</i>
<i>The pill causes birth defects.</i>	<i>The pill does not cause birth defects or affect the health of future children.</i>
<i>The pill will affect my ability to become pregnant even after I stop taking it.</i>	<i>The pill will not hurt a woman's future ability to become pregnant.</i>
<i>The pill causes breast cancer.</i>	<i>Worldwide data indicate that the pill does not increase a woman's risk of breast cancer over her lifetime.</i>
<i>I need to stop taking the pill to give my body a 'rest.'</i>	<i>The pill does not need to be stopped to allow the body to take a break.</i>
<i>The pill causes blood clots, heart attack, and stroke.</i>	<i>Healthy, nonsmoking women who take the pill have no increased risk of heart attack or stroke. There may be a small increase in the risk of blood clots, but this risk is less than during pregnancy.</i>
<i>The pill causes cancer.</i>	<i>Pill use lessens the risk of ovarian and endometrial cancers. Some evidence suggests that long-term pill use increases the risk of cervical cancer; however, this is not proven. All women should have regular Pap smears to screen for cervical abnormalities.</i>

Benefits of the Pill

Menstrual benefits

- less pain and fewer cramps with your periods
- lighter periods that last fewer days
- regular periods

Lowers the risk of

- iron deficiency anemia
- infections of the upper reproductive tract
- noncancerous breast cysts
- ectopic pregnancy
- ovarian cancer
- endometrial cancer

May help protect against

- osteoporosis (brittle bones)
- colon cancer

Smoking and the Pill

Unfortunately, many women mistakenly believe that taking birth control pills is dangerous. The truth is that smoking cigarettes is much more dangerous to your health.

Women who take the birth control pill may get a side effect called breakthrough bleeding. Breakthrough bleeding consists of spotting or bleeding in between periods. This side effect is not harmful, but can be inconvenient. It usually disappears within 3 months of starting the pill. Women who smoke cigarettes are more likely to experience this side effect than women who don't smoke.

Unfortunately, women who smoke cigarettes and are over age 35 years should not use pills with these two hormones. Older women who smoke and women who smoke more than 15 cigarettes a day, have an increased risk of heart attack and stroke when using the pill. Progestin-only pills can be used by older women who smoke, but these pills don't have all of the health benefits. So, if you smoke and you want to use the pill, you should **stop smoking**.

WARNING SIGNS: You need to call a doctor or the family planning clinic if I have any of the following early warning signs develop:

A – Abdominal pain (severe)

C - Chest pain or shortness of breath

H – Headaches (severe); dizziness, weakness, numbness

E – Eye problems – blurred vision, flashing lights, or blindness; speech problems

S – Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

ADDITIONAL WARNINGS specific to the Birth Control Pill YASMIN

You should not take the birth control pill YASMIN if have had, now have, or develop in the future, diseases of the kidneys, liver or adrenal glands.

YASMIN is different from other birth control pills because it contains the progestin drospirenone. Drospirenone may increase potassium levels and this could cause serious heart and health problems.

If you are currently on daily, long-term treatment for a chronic condition with any of the medications below, be sure to tell your clinician before using YASMIN:

- NSAIDs (ibuprofen [Motrin, Advil], naprosyn [Aleve, and others])
- Potassium-sparing diuretics (spironolactone and others)
- Potassium supplementation
- ACE inhibitors (Capoten, Vasotec, Zestril, and others)
- Angiotensin-II receptor antagonists (Cozaar, Diovan, Avapro and others)

What if I decide to stop taking the pill?

You may stop taking the pill at any time. You should use another method of birth control if you do not want to become pregnant. If you are having side effects, or are unsure about what to do if you miss pills—don't stop taking them. Call the clinic to ask questions and/or receive another method of birth control. **Remember...regular exams for routine healthcare, including screenings for sexually transmitted diseases and cancer, are strongly recommended!**

What do I need to know about taking the pill?

There are three important things to remember about taking the pill:

1. *When to start each pill pack*—Your first pill pack (and each new pack after it) is started either on the first day of your period (the first day of bleeding) or on the first Sunday after your period starts. Your clinician will tell you which method to use. After that, it is important to that each new pill pack be started on the same day of the week, no matter when your period starts or ends.
2. *When to take your pills*—It is important to remember to take your pill at the same time every day. Choose the most convenient time of the day for yourself, when you first start taking the pill, and then be sure to continue taking them at the same time.
3. *When you forget to take a pill*—If you forget to take a pill at the correct time, take it as soon as you remember. **2 PILLS MISSED**: Make up the two pills by taking one pill in the morning and one pill in the evening for two day in a row. Use foam and condoms for the remainder of the pill pack. **3 PILLS MISSED**: Throw away all three pills and begin on the fourth pill. You may have some breakthrough bleeding (spotting). **DO NOT STOP TAKING YOUR PILLS**. This bleeding is normal after missing three pills. Use foam and condoms for extra protection for the rest of this pill pack.

Questions??

If you have questions about side effects, or if you are unsure about using the implant-call the clinic right away!