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## Oral Contraceptives: Birth Control Pills



### What are oral contraceptives?

Birth control pills or oral contraceptives use synthetic hormones to prevent pregnancy. There are two types: combined and progesterone only. Combined pills contain synthetic forms of estrogen and progesterone. Oral contraceptives are commonly used to treat menstrual problems and decrease acne

### How do oral contraceptives work?

Oral contraceptives are designed to prevent pregnancy in one of three ways:

Prevent ovulation each month.

The cervix produces less and thicker mucus so that sperm cannot easily enter the uterus.

The lining of the uterus becomes thinner, making it more difficult for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus should ovulation occur and fertilization take place.

**Ethical Consideration.**

### How do you use oral contraceptives?

Oral contraceptives are obtained through a prescription from your healthcare provider. Oral contraceptives usually come in a package of 28 pills that contain 21 active pills with hormones and 7 placebo pills. A new birth control pill has just been approved by the FDA (9/5/03) that contains 84 active pills and 7 placebo pills.

You are encouraged to take the pills at the same time every day.

### What if I forget to take some of my oral contraceptives?

If you forget to take some of the pills, you will have menstrual bleeding at irregular times, and the likelihood of pregnancy increases. When you forget to take a pill, take it

as soon as you can. Take your next pill at the usual time. If you forget to take two or more pills in a row, you should refrain from sexual intercourse or use a back up method of contraception. You also should contact your health care professional on what to do next.

### How effective are oral contraceptives?

If pills are taken every day at the same time, and each pack is started on time, oral contraceptives are 99% effective in preventing pregnancy. On average, oral contraceptives are 93–97% effective because women often miss pills or do not start a new pack on time. Contact your healthcare provider if you are experiencing any pregnancy symptoms.

### What are the side effects or health risks of oral contraceptives?

The dosage of hormones has decreased over the years; subsequently the risk associated with birth control pills has declined tremendously.

Pills may cause nausea, breast tenderness, irregular spotting, weight gain, mood changes or headaches.

Blood clots are a potential risk . Two in 10,000 women will experience blood clots as compared to one in 10,000 women for those who do not use oral contraceptives.

You should not use oral contraceptives if you have a history of stroke, heart attacks, blood clots, liver disease, breast cancer or are over 35 years old and smoke.

You should consult your physician about oral contraceptives or alternative contraception methods if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or other risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

### What are the health benefits of oral contraceptives?

Periods are usually lighter with less cramping

If used for several years, the chance of developing cancer of the ovaries and uterus are decreased

Decreases cysts on the ovaries, endometriosis, anemia, and fibrocystic breast disease

### Are oral contraceptives reversible?

Yes. Most women ovulate and have their menstrual cycle within four to six weeks once they stop taking the pills. If you have not had a menstrual cycle for two to three months after stopping the pill, a pregnancy test should be performed and a health care provider contacted.

### How much do oral contraceptives cost?

The initial physical exam in your healthcare provider's office could range from \$20 to

\$200. The monthly fee for each supply of pills ranges from \$5 to \$30 or more, depending on your medical coverage.

### What about oral contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases (STD's)?

Oral contraceptives do NOT provide any protection against any sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

### What are the pros & cons of oral contraceptives?

#### **The Pros of Oral Contraceptives include:**

- Low failure rate if used daily as directed
- Does not interrupt foreplay or sexual intercourse
- Research for over 40 years has proven long term safety
- Moderately priced
- Easy to use

#### **The Cons of Oral Contraceptives include:**

- Requires a prescription
- Potential side effects like nausea and breast tenderness
- Chance of blood clots in legs and lungs
- Must be taken every day at the same time
- No protection against STD's

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