

# ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES

## *Everything You Always Wanted to Know...*

BUT DIDN'T KNOW TO ASK

### **Q: When is a birth control pill more than just a birth control pill?**

**A:** When it also prevents acne, mood-related menstrual cycle symptoms, irregular or heavy bleeding and cramping and cools hot flashes. Oral contraceptives can also prevent bone loss in women who have irregular periods.

- Three birth control pills are available for continuous contraception. Seasonale and Seasonique are designed to allow a period every three months; Lybrel is designed to allow a period once a year.
- Yaz, an oral contraceptive that contains ethinyl estradiol and drospirenone, has been approved for treatment of premenstrual dysphoric disorder, a severe form of PMS.
- Allesse, Ortho-Tricyclen and Diane-35 have been approved for the treatment of acne as well as for contraception.

### **Q: How do oral contraceptives prevent pregnancy?**

**A:** Combination estrogen/progestin pills suppress the mid-cycle surge of luteinizing hormone, preventing ovulation. They prevent egg follicles from maturing in the ovary and they make the uterine lining less hospitable for implantation by changing the thickness of the cervical mucus so it's harder for sperm to break through. OCs also interfere with fallopian tube contractions so the egg doesn't get from the ovary to the uterus.

### **TYPES OF PILLS**

**Monophasic:** Contain the same dose of estrogen and progestin in each of 21 pills, followed by a week of "placebo" pills or a week with no pills.

**Biphasic:** Contain a steady dose of estrogen but increasing dose of progestin for the first 11 days of the cycle.

**Triphasic:** Contain varying doses of progestin or estrogen plus progestin throughout the 21-day cycle.

**Progestin-only:** Generally only prescribed for breastfeeding women. Prolonged use can lead to some bone loss.

#### **OC FACT:**

*There is no evidence that one type of birth control pill is any more effective than another when used as directed.*



## 10 FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT Birth Control Pills

1. Birth control pills (also called oral contraceptives or OCs) won't make you gain weight.
2. Combination OCs (estrogen/progestin) can prevent ectopic (tubal) pregnancy.
3. Oral contraceptives can help prevent ovarian cysts, endometrial cancer and colon cancer. They cannot prevent sexually transmitted infections.
4. Using OCs in your 30s could help prevent hip fracture later in life.
5. Oral contraceptives can prevent heavy bleeding during your period and reduce the risk of iron-deficiency anemia.
6. Oral contraceptives can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer, including some hereditary forms associated with mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes.
7. There are no serious medical consequences to skipping periods by using birth control pills as continuous contraception.
8. There is a chewable birth control pill, Femcon Fe, that includes seven days of pills that contain iron.
9. Today, more than 40 different OC brands are available to U.S. women.
10. Oral contraceptives may not be for you if you are over 35 and smoke, are overweight or obese, have diabetes or hypertension or a personal or family history of clotting disorders.

### DON'T FORGET!

You need to take your pill every day at the same time for it to be effective. To make sure you don't forget, link it with an activity you automatically do in the morning or evening, like brushing your teeth, pouring your coffee, putting your contacts in or taking them out. After a couple of weeks, taking your pill should be as automatic as buckling your seat belt when you get in the car.

Visit [www.HealthyWomen.org/menstrual cycle](http://www.HealthyWomen.org/menstrualcycle) to learn more about contraception and how to manage your menstrual cycle.



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Health Resource Center**  
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