

# Birth Control Pills

## What are birth control pills used for?

Birth control pills are used to keep you from getting pregnant. They also are sometimes used to help treat symptoms of irregular, heavy, or painful menstrual periods. If you are taking birth control pills, you should take them according to the schedule prescribed by your healthcare provider.

Birth control pills are one of the most reliable forms of birth control. For every 1000 women who use the pills exactly as instructed for a year, 3 women may get pregnant. The chance for pregnancy is higher if you don't carefully follow the instructions for taking the pills.

Another name for birth control pills is oral contraceptives.

## How do they work?

Birth control pills contain medicine that is similar to a woman's natural hormones. Normally, the hormones control the release of an egg from an ovary each month. Taking a birth control pill changes the hormone levels and keeps the ovaries from releasing an egg. If the ovaries don't release an egg, you cannot get pregnant. The hormones also cause a thickening of the mucus on the cervix and change the lining of the uterus. These changes also help prevent pregnancy.

The most common pills contain man-made forms of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. There is also a progesterone-only pill, which is used only in special cases.

When you take birth control pills, your periods are regular and usually lighter. Menstrual cramps may not be as painful. The symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) may not be as bothersome.

## What else do I need to know about this medicine?

- Follow the directions that come with your medicine, including information about food or alcohol. Make sure you know how and when to take your medicine. Ask your healthcare provider if there are special precautions you should take when you start using the pills and what you should do if you miss a pill.
- This medicine does not keep you from getting AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Latex or polyurethane condoms are the only method of birth control that can protect against the HIV virus and AIDS.
- Smoking while you are using this medicine increases the risk of serious side effects. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to quit smoking.
- Many medicines have side effects. A side effect is a symptom or problem that is caused by the medicine. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what side effects the medicine may cause and what you should do if you have side effects.

- Keep a list of your medicines with you. List all of the prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins that you take. Tell all healthcare providers who treat you about all of the products you are taking.
- Try to get all of your prescriptions filled at the same place. Your pharmacist can help make sure that all of your medicines are safe to take together.

If you have any questions, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information. Be sure to keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

Developed by RelayHealth.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*