



Birth Control Pills (BCPs) contain hormones that reduce the chance that an egg will be released from the ovary. BCPs also prevent pregnancy by reducing the amount of cervical mucus present, thus making it more difficult for an egg to implant. BCPs are 99 percent effective if taken properly and consistently.

Benefits

1. Decreased cramping and flow with menstrual periods
2. Predictable, regular menstrual cycles
3. Reduced acne
4. Decreased risk of breast cysts or lumps, ovarian cysts or anemia
5. Lower risk for uterine cancer and ovarian cancer
6. Lower risk for Pelvic Inflammation Disease (PID).
7. Safe to take with antibiotics
8. Decrease in unwanted facial and body hair

Disadvantages

1. Does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
2. Less effective if taken with certain medications: St. John’s Wort, certain seizure medications, rifampin, and griseofulvin.

Instructions

The most effective way to start your BCPs is to start your first pack on the first day of your period. The advantage of doing this is that you are protected from pregnancy for that cycle. If you start your BCPs on the first Sunday after your period begins or your doctor or other health care professional recommends an “immediate” start, then use condoms for the first two weeks. To make it easier to remember to take your BCPs, try taking it with some daily activity, like going to bed, brushing your teeth or taking it with your multi-vitamin. (We recommend that all women of childbearing age take folic acid (0.4 mg) every day. The easiest

way to do this is with a standard multi-vitamin.) BCPs are most effective if you take them at the same time every day. It is a good idea to check your pack daily to make sure that you took your last BCP the day before.

A new and safe way to take some BCPs allows you to have only four periods a year. Talk to your OB/GYN health care professional if you are interested in this option.

If you do not miss any BCPs but skip an expected period, you are unlikely to be pregnant. You can start a new package of BCPs after you have taken all in the previous pack. If you miss two periods in a row, have a pregnancy test.

If you have not been taking your BCPs correctly and have missed a period, you may be pregnant. Use an additional form of birth control (condoms) and have a pregnancy test. If you are pregnant, contact OB/GYN to schedule an appointment.

Missed BCPs			
Consecutive BCPs missed	Week in the pack of pills	How late taking the BCP	Instructions
1	1 st or 2 nd wk. of pk.	Less than 24 hours	Take the missed BCP immediately and next BCP at regular time.*
1	1 st or 2 nd wk. of pk.	24 hours	Take both BCPs at the same time.*
1 or 2	1 st or 2 nd wk. of pk.	More than 24 hours	Take the last BCP missed, take next BCP on time, and take rest of BCPs on schedule.*
1 or more	3 rd wk. of pk.	Anytime	Take 1 BCP daily until last active BCP, skip placebo BCPs, and begin new BCP cycle immediately.*
3 or more	Anytime	Anytime	Take 1 BCP daily until last active BCP, skip placebo BCPs, and begin new BCP cycle immediately.*

* Additional back-up contraception (condoms) should be started as soon as you realize that you missed taking the BCPs and should be continued for at least 14 days.

If you have intercourse and you have not been taking your BCPs correctly and you do not want to become pregnant, contact your health care professional for emergency contraception. If you have unprotected sex and use emergency contraception, you should restart a new package of your BCPs the day after you take the emergency contraception, and you should use condoms for two weeks.

After a pregnancy

If you had a baby and plan to breast-feed, speak to your OB/GYN health care professional about progestin-only BCPs. If you plan not to breastfeed, speak to your OB/GYN health care professional about when to restart BCPs. It is safe to restart BCPs right after an abortion or miscarriage.

Common side effects

The risks associated with taking BCPs are less than the risks associated with pregnancy, unless you are over 35 years of age and smoke. Smoking raises your risk of strokes and heart attacks. Most side effects caused by BCPs are temporary (lasting about two to three months). These may include:

1. Nausea and vomiting. (It helps to take your BCPs at bedtime or with a meal.)
2. Appetite changes that could result in slight weight gain or weight loss.
3. Breast tenderness and enlargement.
4. Spotting or slight bleeding at times other than when you expect your menstrual period. (Taking your BCPs at the same time everyday helps prevent spotting.)
5. Chloasma (skin pigmentation

changes). Skin darkens on upper lip, under eyes or on forehead. Sun protection prevents it from worsening.

6. Slight changes in vaginal discharge.
7. Slight headaches that go away with over-the-counter medication and/or bed rest.
8. Fluid retention.

Less common side effects

1. Mood changes and fatigue.
2. Decreased sex drive.

More serious but rare side effects

1. Hypertension. High blood pressure caused by BCPs is usually reversible very quickly, but it can lead to permanent complications.
2. Gallbladder disease.
3. Blood clots developing in the legs, lungs, brain, heart, or elsewhere. Remember you are at more risk for developing blood clots, strokes, and heart attacks if you smoke and are over the age of 35.
4. Liver tumors or liver problems with jaundice.
5. Yellowing of skin (jaundice).

Danger signals

Some of the following may be signs of a serious medical condition. Be alert for danger signals so that side effects can be treated.

1. Severe abdominal pain.
2. Severe chest pain, arm pain, shortness of breath, coughing up blood.
3. Severe headaches, vomiting, dizziness, faintness, muscle weakness or numbness, or speech disturbance.
4. Vision change – blurred, flashing lights or visual loss.
5. Severe leg pain.

If you have any of the above signs, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.*

If you are interested in taking BCPs, talk to your health care professional about a prescription. You and your health care professional will determine if BCPs are right for you.

Other birth control alternatives

- intrauterine device (IUD)
- injection: Depo-Provera
- patch
- vaginal ring
- condom
- diaphragm and cream/jelly
- cervical cap
- spermicidal foam
- sterilization
- abstinence
- emergency contraception

For more information on BCPs and other birth control methods, contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Department.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

Web sites

- Association of Reproductive Health Professionals: arhp.org
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: acog.org
- Planned Parenthood: plannedparenthood.org

* If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or, (2) when you are in active labor and there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your or your unborn child's health and safety.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.