

Birth Control Method

Combined Hormonal Birth Control Pills

What Is It?

Combined hormonal birth control pills contain the hormones:

- Estrogen
- Progestin

How Does It Work?

- Stops the ovaries from “ovulating” or releasing eggs each month
 - Thickens the cervical mucus, making it harder for sperm to reach a potential egg
- Thins the lining of the uterus.

How Do I Use It?

- Take one (1) pill at a time each day
 - Your pill pack may include placebo pills; expect a withdrawal bleed during that time
- If you pack doesn't include placebo pills, nothing is taken those days but you're still protected from pregnancy, as long as you start your next pack on time
- Your provider may instruct you to take the hormonal pills differently if needed

Benefits

- Make “periods” more regular, lighter & shorter
- Reduce menstrual cramps
- Decrease risk of uterine, ovarian & colon cancer
- Improve acne and unwanted hair growth
- Treat disorders of heavy menstrual bleeding/pain, such as endometriosis & fibroids
- Reduce frequency of migranes associated with menstruation

Possible Side Effects

- Headache
- Nausea
- Breast tenderness
- Breakthrough bleeding

Typically side effects are minor & resolve after several months of use.

Risks

Combined pills are safe for most women; however they are linked to a small increase in the development in blood clots, heart attack, and stroke. You may not be a good candidate if you have the following risk factors:

- 35 years or older with risk factors
- Smoke cigarettes or use other nicotine containing products
- Have high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- History of blood clots/blood clotting disorders
- Have migraines with aura
- Have certain liver or gallbladder disease
- Have a history of breast cancer

Risks for blood clots increase while on combined oral contraceptives, especially after surgery or during long periods of travel.

What if I Skip a Dose?

The package insert has specific instructions regarding missing a dose. In general, if you miss one dose, take it as soon as you remember or with the next dose. If you miss three or more pills in a month you should use a back up form of contraception.

Effectiveness of combined hormonal pills compared to other methods	Highly Effective
	Less Effective
Protects against STI's, including HIV?	No.
Effective right away?	Yes, if you start taking the pills within 5 days of the start of your menstrual period. If you start taking the pills at any other time, avoid sexual intercourse or use a back-up method (condom), for the next 7 days.
OK with breastfeeding?	Yes, although there may be a decrease in milk production.