

SARAH SAYS:

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HORMONAL METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL

What are hormonal methods of birth control?

They are birth control pills, contraceptive patch, contraceptive ring and depo-provera injections.

How do they work?

These methods prevent the ovaries from releasing an egg. They also thicken the cervical mucous, making it more difficult for sperm to gain access to the upper reproductive tract. They also may prevent a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterus. These methods are also reversible, i.e. there is normal return to fertility once the method is discontinued.

How well do they work?

If used correctly, these methods carry a 1% or less risk of pregnancy. In other words, during the first year of typical use between 1-5 women out of 100 become pregnant.

What are the benefits of hormonal birth control?

- Less menstrual cramping and bleeding
- Regular periods (except with depo-provera)
- Reduced iron deficiency/anemia
- Decreased risk of tubal pregnancy
- Decreased risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- Decrease acne
- Decrease in premenstrual symptoms
- Decrease in rheumatoid arthritis symptoms
- Decrease risk for ovarian and endometrial (uterine) cancers, ovarian cysts, non-cancerous breast tumors and osteoporosis.

What are the risks of hormonal birth control?

Users of hormonal methods of birth control have a slightly greater risk than non-users of developing certain serious health problems. In very rare cases these problems may be fatal. These serious health problems include, but are not limited to:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Blood clots in the veins or lungs
- Liver tumors

The chance of developing these problems increase with age, cigarette smoking (especially 15 or more cigarettes per day), strong family history of developing these problems at a young age, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and certain inherited conditions that increase the risk of developing blood clots.

Most Women can safely take hormonal methods of birth control, however you should not use these methods if you are:

- pregnant
- over 35 and smoke more than 15 cigarettes a day
- experiencing unexplained vaginal bleeding
- someone with an inherited tendency to develop blood clots
- someone with a history of blood clots in the veins or lungs
- being treated for active liver disease
- someone with a history of liver tumors

- someone with a history of breast or uterine cancer or other estrogen dependent tumors

You may need special tests to see if you should use hormonal methods of birth control if you have the following health conditions:

- heart disease
- liver disease
- high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol
- diabetes, even if it occurred with pregnancy
- certain types of migraine headaches
- seizure disorders that require medications
- malignant melanoma (type of skin cancer)
- meningioma (a type of brain tumor)
- a parent or sibling with a history of stroke, heart attack, or lung clots prior to age 55

Possible problems while using hormonal methods of birth control

Most women adjust to using these methods with few or no problems. But all medication, including hormonal methods of birth control pose the risk of some side effects. In most cases these side effects are minor and clear up within a few cycles of use. These possible side effects include:

- spotting between periods
- breast tenderness
- nausea or vomiting
- weight gain or loss
- increased or decreased sexual drive
- irritability or mood swings

Persistent side effects may often be relieved by a change in the type of hormonal contraceptive used.

Warning signs:

A woman using a hormonal method of birth control needs to tell her clinician immediately if any of the following occurs:

- sudden or constant leg pain or redness
- sudden shortness of breath or coughing up blood
- sudden or severe chest, abdominal, or arm pain
- severe headache
- sudden blurred or double vision or loss of vision in one eye
- yellowing of skin or eyes
- severe depression
- weakness or loss of sensation or arm, leg, face

How to get a method of hormonal contraception:

These methods are available by prescription. A woman needs to schedule an appointment with a provider of gynecological services in order to have an initial assessment and receive a prescription. While it is not necessary to have a pelvic exam in order to receive one of these methods, your provider will discuss the timing of such an exam based on your individual situation. You will receive specific instructions regarding how to use the method you chose. Hormonal methods of birth control do not provide adequate protection against sexually transmitted infections. The consistent use of barrier (male and female condoms) is advised.