

Side Effects of Hormonal Contraceptives

What are hormonal contraceptives?

Hormonal contraceptives are medicines or devices that can reduce your risk of getting pregnant. They contain hormones called estrogen (ESS-tro-jen) and progestin (pro-JEST-tin). Some contraceptives contain a combination of these hormones, and others contain only progestin. Some types of combination methods are contraceptive pills (also called birth-control pills or “the pill”), a patch that is worn on the skin, and a ring that is placed in the vagina. Progestin-only methods include pills, shots, implants that are placed under the skin, and intrauterine devices (also called IUDs).

What are the side effects?

Most women do not have serious side effects from hormonal contraceptives. If you do have side effects, they will probably go away on their own after a few months. You might have:

- Weight gain
- Headaches
- Sore breasts
- Irregular periods
- Mood changes
- Decreased sexual desire
- Acne
- Nausea

Some types of hormonal contraception are more likely to cause certain side effects than others.

What should I do if I have side effects?

If you have side effects that last more than three months, talk to your doctor about switching to another method.

How can I lower my chances of having side effects?

If you are taking the pill, be sure to take one every day. This lowers your risk of bleeding between periods. Progestin-only pills must be taken at the same time each day. The contraceptive patch and ring should be changed according to the schedule given by your doctor.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource
Web site: <http://familydoctor.org>

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Web site: <http://www.arhp.org/methodmatch/>

Bridging the Gap Foundation
Web site: <http://www.managingcontraception.com>

Planned Parenthood
Web site: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control-4211.htm>

Princeton University's Emergency Contraception Website
Web site: <http://ec.princeton.edu/>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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