

Stopping Hormonal Birth Control: What to Know

Hormonal contraception – including birth control pills, patches, injections, implants, vaginal rings, or intrauterine devices (IUDs) – use hormones to prevent pregnancy, and can also treat some health conditions like acne or irregular periods.

If you're ready to discontinue taking hormonal birth control, here's what to expect.

Common reasons for stopping hormonal birth control

People may choose to stop taking hormonal contraception for a number of reasons, including:

- Not currently sexually active
- Desire to use a different contraceptive method (for example, a non-hormonal IUD)
- Desire for pregnancy
- Side effects (some people starting hormonal birth control experience side effects like headaches, nausea, mood changes, sore breasts, period irregularity, etc., which usually go away within 2-3 months)
- Increased feelings of depression and/or anxiety (hormonal birth control has been linked with an increased risk of experiencing depression and anxiety)
- Libido changes or reduced sex drive
- Guidance from a medical provider due to a medical condition that may be exacerbated by hormonal birth control (for example, headaches, or high blood pressure)

When & how to stop

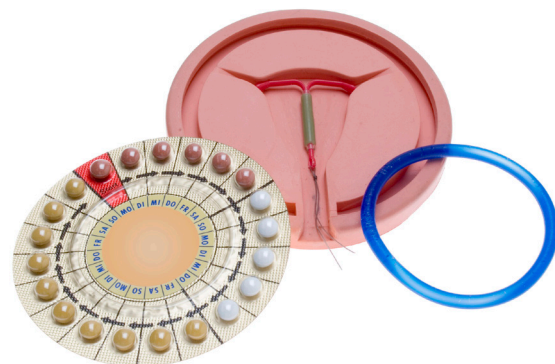
It is safe to stop taking hormonal contraception at any time, even in the middle of a cycle.

If you are sexually active and you do not want to become pregnant, make sure you use another contraceptive method.

If you are switching to a different birth control method, talk with your healthcare provider to learn how long it will take for your new method to become effective. A backup contraceptive method such as condoms can be used during the transition.

What to expect after stopping

- **If you are sexually active, you can get pregnant right away, even if you haven't gotten your period yet.** (*Exception: The hormones in contraceptive injections stay in your body longer, so it can take months before fertility returns.*)



When you stop taking hormonal birth control, it will take some time for your body to adjust.

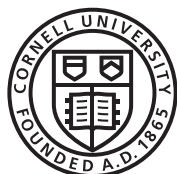
- **Your menstrual cycle will need some time to adjust.** You might experience irregular periods and spotting / bleeding between periods for a few months, until your cycle returns to how it was before you started taking birth control. If you have been on hormonal birth control for a long time, or started it when you were very young, your menstrual cycle may have changed over time. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have concerns about this.
- **You might experience other symptoms due to hormonal changes**, including mood changes, acne, and sore breasts (similar to PMS).
- **Any symptoms being treated with birth control will likely resume** (acne, irregular or heavy periods, painful menstrual cramps, PCOS symptoms, etc.)

Any negative side effects you may have should go away within a few months. If your regular cycle doesn't resume in three months, or you're concerned about symptoms you're experiencing, schedule an appointment with your medical provider. (*Exception: It may take 10 months or more for ovulation / periods to resume after stopping contraceptive injections.*)

Concerns about post-birth-control syndrome

"Post-Birth-Control Syndrome" (PBCS) is not a medical diagnosis, but rather a term that some people use to describe symptoms that people can experience in the months after stopping hormonal birth control, including changes to your menstrual period, mood changes, acne, sore breasts, hair loss, and low libido / sex drive.

These symptoms are usually temporary and not a sign of a serious condition. However, if you have questions or concerns, schedule an appointment with your medical provider.



Beware of birth control pill misinformation

Birth control pills are the most commonly prescribed form of contraception in the United States, and are safe and effective for the vast majority of users. There is no evidence that being on the pill – or going off the pill – causes any long-term health effects.

You might find that there's a lot of misinformation about sexual and reproductive healthcare online and on social media – for example, claims that the pill causes infertility, or that Post-Birth-Control Syndrome should be treated with special (and often expensive) supplements. Please be sure you are getting health information from reputable sources. You can find a list of recommended sources on our website: health.cornell.edu/sexual-health-resources.

Questions?

Please schedule an appointment with your primary care provider at Cornell Health: health.cornell.edu/appointments. You can also call us 24/7 to consult with a nurse: 607-255-5155.