



## Health Benefits of Oral Contraceptives

The pill is one of the most effective methods for preventing pregnancy. Unfortunately, many women are reluctant to use oral contraceptives (OCs) because they think that the pill is dangerous or causes cancer. You may have heard or read that the pill is bad for you. The truth is, for most women, the pill is very safe. Pill use also offers a number of health benefits. In fact, some women may take the pill for reasons other than contraception. Some of these reasons include regulating menstrual periods, treating painful menstruation, and treating hormonal imbalances.

### *What effects will the pill have on my period?*

Women and teenagers who take the pill usually have less pain and fewer cramps with their periods. Some women experience a decrease in premenstrual tension (PMS) with pill use. Most women also have lighter periods that last fewer days. Fewer bleeding days help to prevent iron deficiency anemia. Taking the pill helps regulate periods in women who experience irregular periods.

### *Can OCs help lessen the risk of certain diseases?*

Yes, pill use helps lessen the risk of two types of life-threatening cancer — cancer of the ovary and cancer of the lining of the womb, or endometrium. This protective effect lasts for many years after a woman stops taking the pill. In fact, women who take the pill are about 40% less likely to develop ovarian cancer than women who have never taken the pill. With many years of OC use the protection may increase up to 80%. Researchers believe that this protective effect is related to the avoidance of monthly ovulation.

Women who take the pill also have about a 50% lower risk of getting endometrial cancer. This protection may be due to the type of hormone called a progestin, which is found in oral contraceptives. Pill use also reduces your chances of being hospitalized for pelvic inflammatory disease (inflammation of the upper genital tract). This protection is limited, however, so condoms also should be used by women taking the pill to help protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Women using OCs are also less likely to have an ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus) and to develop noncancerous cysts or lumps in the breast. Some research suggests that long-term use of OCs helps prevent loss of bone density, which may develop into osteoporosis (brittle bones) later in life. The pill may also lessen the chance of developing colorectal cancer.

### **Benefits of the Pill**

#### Menstrual benefits

- *less pain and fewer cramps with your periods*
- *lighter periods that last fewer days*
- *regular periods*

#### Lowers the risk of

- *iron deficiency anemia*
- *infections of the upper reproductive tract*
- *noncancerous breast cysts*
- *ectopic pregnancy*
- *ovarian cancer*
- *endometrial cancer*

#### May help protect against

- *osteoporosis (brittle bones)*
- *colon cancer*



**“I heard the pill makes you gain weight and causes cancer.”**

***“My doctor told me that’s not true. She told me the pill has health benefits. It lessens the risk of two kinds of cancer and helps regulate my periods with less cramping.”***

## FACTS ABOUT THE PILL

### *You may have heard:*

### *The truth is:*

The pill will make me gain weight.

The pill does not make you fat. Lack of exercise and overeating cause weight gain. Most women who take the pill do not experience a change in weight.

The pill causes birth defects.

The pill does not cause birth defects or affect the health of future children.

The pill will affect my ability to become pregnant even after I stop taking it.

The pill will not hurt a woman’s future ability to become pregnant.

The pill will stop my growth and development.

The pill does not stunt growth and development.

I need to stop taking the pill every so often to give my body a ‘rest.’

The pill does not need to be stopped to allow the body to take a break.

It’s dangerous to use the pill while breastfeeding.

Pill use is safe while breastfeeding, but should begin after milk production is firmly established.

The pill causes blood clots, heart attack, and stroke.

Healthy, nonsmoking women who take the pill have no increased risk of heart attack or stroke. There may be a small increase in the risk of blood clots, but this risk is less than during pregnancy.

The pill causes cancer.

Pill use lessens the risk of ovarian and endometrial cancers. Some evidence suggests that long-term pill use increases the risk of cervical cancer; however, this is not proven. All women should have regular Pap smears to screen for cervical abnormalities.

The pill causes breast cancer.

Worldwide data indicate that the pill does not increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer over her lifetime.

### ***The Pill Lessens the Risk of Two Kinds of Cancer***

**50%  
Decreased  
Risk of  
Endometrial  
Cancer**

**40% to 80%  
Decreased  
Risk of  
Ovarian  
Cancer**

