Oral Contraceptives (OCs)

Brand Names:

What is in oral contraceptives?
OCs have the hormones estrogen and progestin. These hormones are similar to the ones produced by your ovaries during your menstrual cycle.

Why is this medicine prescribed?
OCs are used to prevent pregnancy. They prevent eggs from being released by your ovaries. They also change the lining of the uterus to prevent pregnancy and change the mucus at the cervix to stop sperm from entering. They may also be used to regulate your menstrual cycle or decrease the pain of menstruation.

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Learn more about your health care.

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How should this medicine be taken?

- For the best effect, OCs should be started **no later than 7 days** from the first day of your period. If you have any questions, ask your pharmacist or doctor for the best time to start.
- Take a pill at the same time every day for the greatest benefit.
- Each new cycle of OCs must be started on the **same day of the week** (for example: many OCs start on a Sunday each month).

What side effects can this medicine cause?

These side effects are common during the first 3 months of use while your body adjusts to OCs. Call your doctor if they do not go away after that amount of time.

- Skipped periods
- Spotting or bleeding
- Nausea
- Bloating
- Breast tenderness
- Weight gain

Other less common side effects include:

- Blotchy spots on skin
- Increased body hair
- Sweating
- Light sensitivity
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Changes in breast size
- Irritability
- Hair loss

Tell your doctor **right away** if you have these side effects:

- Fainting
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe headaches
- Severe leg pain or swelling
- Chest pain
- Eye problems

Other side effects not listed may also occur in some patients. Check with your doctor if you notice any other effects.
What health benefits do oral contraceptives have other than preventing pregnancy?

OCs decrease the risk of these health problems:

- Anemia
- Menstrual cramps
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Toxic shock syndrome
- Ovarian cancer
- Endometrial cancer
- Ovarian cysts
- Acne
- Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

What special instructions should I follow while using this medicine?

- Take OCs at the same time each day.
- Use other methods of birth control until you have gone through at least one complete cycle while taking OCs unless your doctor has instructed you otherwise.
- Do not allow anyone else to take this medicine.
- Keep all appointments with your doctor so your body's response to this medicine can be evaluated.
- Keep yearly appointments with your doctor for a gynecology exam, pap smear and blood pressure check.

What food-drug and drug-drug interactions are there? What special dietary instructions should I follow while using this drug?

- Make sure that every doctor or dentist taking care of you knows that you are taking OCs.
- There are many medicines that will decrease the effectiveness of OCs. The major ones are:
  - **Seizure medicines** - Check with your doctor or health care provider.
  - **Antibiotics** – Check with your doctor or health care provider. Although most antibiotics do not interfere, your doctor may recommend a back-up method such as condoms while on antibiotics and for 7 days after.
• Antacids such as Maalox and Riopan may decrease the absorption of OCs. Take antacids at least 2 hours before or after you take your tablet.
• It does not matter if you take OCs with or without food.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?
• If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you forget to take it until the next day, take 2 tablets to make up for the missed dose.
• If you miss 2 to 3 days, continue taking the OCs and practice another method of birth control. Call your doctor or health care provider for further instructions.

What other precautions should I follow while using this medicine?
Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have any of these conditions:
• Pregnancy or breast feeding
• Diabetes
• History of blood clots
• Seizures
• History of cancer or breast disease
• Circulatory problems
• High blood pressure
• Heart disease
• Depression
• Migraines

If you are 35 years or older, do not smoke while taking OCs. Smoking will increase your risk of heart attack.

Oral contraceptives will not protect against HIV or other types of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

What storage conditions are needed for this medicine?
Keep this medicine:
• In its original container
• At room temperature
• Out of the reach of children
• Away from sunlight or moisture