

Continuous Birth Control Hormone Therapy

Other than for birth control, “The Pill” (BCP) can also be used for hormone therapy. Each active pill contains synthetic estrogen and progesterone. If these are taken daily, the menstrual cycle hormones and periods can be suppressed. The hormones in the Pill replace those not being made by the ovaries. This is called continuous birth control. While on continuous birth control there are no or infrequent periods.

On continuous birth control, the ovaries become dormant and stop making eggs and hormones. Ovulation is prevented so there is a very low chance of pregnancy. Continuous birth control is done for medical reasons (for women who are not menopausal) when the goal is to stop periods and stop hormone cycles. Continuous BCP therapy can be used to help manage perimenopause, severe PMS, endometriosis, ovarian cysts, heavy menstrual flow, fibroids, and other female disorders. This is not used on a menopausal female due to the higher hormone doses in the Pill compared to menopausal hormone therapy.

A typical BCP pack contains 28 pills. The first 21 or 24 pills contain hormones (active pills), and the last 7 or 4 days contain placebo or “sugar” pills (sometimes iron). This results in a 28-day menstrual cycle similar to a natural cycle. The placebo pills create the period due to hormone withdrawal. If you don’t take placebo pills, you don’t get a period. The 28-day pill was designed for consumer acceptance by duplicating the common 28-day menstrual cycle. There are also FDA-approved pills on the market that contain 13 weeks of pills. The first 12 weeks are active pills and week 13 is a placebo week. This results in one period every 3 months. This is an FDA approved BCP where there is a period every 3 months.

While on this therapy, it is perfectly safe to not have a period. Many women believe that there is a build-up of the uterine lining that needs to come out. This is correct for normal menstruating females, but is not true when using continuous birth control. There is no build-up due to the combination of synthetic estrogen and progesterone in each pill.

How to start continuous birth control:

1. Day 1 is the first day of a period unless you are told otherwise. Start a package of pills on Day 1. Take one pill a day of active pills only. Depending on what pack of BCP you get, there might be 21, 24 or 84 active pills.
2. After you take the final active pill of the pack, discard the pack. Start the next pack of pills the next day. Do not skip a day, and do not take the placebo pills.
3. You might get some spotting on this plan. It usually resolves on its own. Just keep taking one pill daily.

Drawbacks

1. Fear of undetected pregnancy: Long intervals of time between periods eliminate the monthly “relief” which can help to reassure you that you are not pregnant. If you are not a good “pill-taker,” then this extended regimen may not be for you. If this regimen is followed carefully, the risk of pregnancy is extremely low and bcp’s do not harm an early fetus.
2. Increased Cost: On this regimen, you will use your pills faster. The pharmacist needs to know what is going on, because many only dispense one package at a time. Ask for 2-3 packs at a time.
3. Some spotting may occur at random times. Call us with any concerns or questions.