

BIRTH CONTROL PILLS FOR THE TREATMENT OF EXCESS MALE HORMONE DISORDERS

Birth Control Pills (BCP) are generally given to women to prevent pregnancy and may also be used to treat endometriosis, pelvic pain and irregular periods. BCPs work by lowering the levels of the hormones FSH and LH produced by the pituitary gland.

BCPs can also be used to decrease the level of male hormones circulating in your blood that come from the ovaries and help treat disorders caused by excess male hormones (androgens), including hirsutism and the polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

BCPs to Treat Hirsutism and PCOS

Hirsutism (excessive body hair found in women that is similar to that of men) is frequently due to the excessive production of androgens by the ovaries. A common disorder that causes excess production of male hormones by the ovary is PCOS. BCPs act to decrease FSH and LH, and subsequently reduce the production of androgens by the ovaries.

Treatment with BCPs is usually continued for at least two years and then reevaluated. The use of BCPs alone to decrease the production of male hormones and to regulate the menstrual cycles has only a modest beneficial effect on excess hair growth. If hirsutism is significant your doctor will generally add an anti-male hormone (anti-androgen) to your treatment. Examples of anti-androgens are Spironolactone, flutamide, and finasteride. BCPs can be combined with these medications to treat hirsutism, at the discretion of your doctor.

Taking BCPs

It is important to remember to take your pills at about the same time each day. Begin your pill-pack on the Sunday following the beginning of your period (even if you are still bleeding). If your period begins on a Sunday, begin the pills that same day. During the first month of taking the BCPs, it will be necessary to use an additional form of birth control (such as condom and foam, or diaphragm) to prevent pregnancy.

When taking BCPs, it is not unusual to have “breakthrough” bleeding (irregular dark brown to reddish spotting). This spotting usually does not occur after the third pack of pills, although in some women it may occur after taking BCPs for years. This is easily corrected by altering the hormone regimen.

(Continued on reverse)

For More Information

To learn more about birth control pills for the treatment of excess male hormone disorders or for an appointment, please contact:

Center for Fertility and Reproductive Medicine

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For other general information about healthcare services at Cedars-Sinai, call 1-800-CEDARS-1 (1-800-233-2771), 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Risks and Side Effects

Remember that although BCPs can be used to reduce the level of male hormones circulating in your blood that come from the ovaries, they are also working as a form of birth control, helping to prevent you from getting pregnant. The following are side-effects of the pill that are not usually a cause for alarm:

- Two to three pound weight gain
- Break-through bleeding
- Mild to moderate nausea (which goes away within the first two months)
- Mild headaches (which go away within the first two months)

Severe complications occur rarely, especially with the lower doses BCPs, in approximately two in 5,000 to 10,000 women who do not smoke. Severe complications include:

- Heart attacks
- Clots in the brain (stroke) or lungs (pulmonary embolism)
- Benign tumors of the liver (which can occasionally rupture)
- High blood pressure

Women smokers over the age of 35 are at greater risk for developing these problems. Women over 35 who are healthy and do not smoke, can use lower doses of BCPs without a major increase in risks.