

# sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

## wildfact

A gynecological exam is not required to receive or start birth control pills at Campus Health.

## Q What are some long term risks of oral contraceptive use?

A. As with any medication, it's always a good idea to ask about potential risks – even if they might not be immediate. Fortunately, oral contraceptives (aka “birth control pills” or “The Pill”) have been shown to be safe for the vast majority of women since their approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1960. In addition to the health benefits they provide in preventing unplanned pregnancies, oral contraceptive (OC) use is actually associated with a decreased risk of ovarian and endometrial cancer. Whether OC users are more likely to develop breast cancer is still being studied. Some studies have shown a slightly increased risk, while others have not.

Women who smoke have increased health-related risks, so they are not good candidates for OCs. For those who do not use tobacco, serious complications such as blood clots are very rare. Additionally, OC use does not impact long-term fertility; 97% of women are able to ovulate and conceive after a few weeks of discontinuing oral contraception. And despite persistent myths, most studies have not found a link between OC use and weight gain or mood changes.

Although OCs are very good at preventing pregnancy when used correctly, they offer no protection against STDs. Next to abstinence,

practicing safer sex through condom use is still the best way to reduce your risk of STDs.

Along with information from your health care provider, the following list of benefits and risks can help you decide if OCs are right for you.

### Benefits:

- Highly effective in preventing pregnancy
- Decreases menstrual bleeding and cramping
- Lessens premenstrual symptoms
- Makes periods more regular
- May prevent ovarian and uterine cancer
- Improves bone density
- Lowers risk of ovarian cysts
- PMS symptoms tend to improve
- May improve acne

### Risks:

- No protection against STDs
- Small risk of heart attack and stroke, which increases among smokers
- Can cause blood clots in rare cases
- Can worsen severe diabetes

Many birth control options, including OCs, are available through the Campus Health Pharmacy. To schedule an appointment with Women's Health, call 621-9202.



Have a question? Send it to [sextalk@email.arizona.edu](mailto:sextalk@email.arizona.edu)

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