

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

Birth control pills could not be dispensed in state university student health services in Arizona until 1981, after approval of the Board of Regents.

Q. I have a question about contraception pills: what are the most effective and what are the side effects?

A. Among women who use oral contraceptives (OCs) correctly and consistently (not missing any pills and following instructions perfectly) only about 3 in 1000 (0.3%) are expected to become pregnant within the first year of use. The failure rates among "typical" users in the real world (read: not perfect) are estimated to be 8 in 100 becoming pregnant (8%). Clearly, there is a big difference between perfect use and typical use.

There are many highly effective brands of OCs with varying combinations of drugs in them (progestin-only versus combined pills, and monophasic versus multiphasic pills). The side effects are largely dependent on the type of OC prescribed. It is best to consult a medical provider for specific drug and brand comparisons.

The benefits of OCs include the convenience of not interrupting the sexual experience, reduction of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms, lighter and shorter periods, improved acne conditions (some brands), and lowered risk of ovarian, endometrial, and colon cancer. Negative side effects include a slightly increased risk of blood clots, no protection against STDs, nausea, fluid retention, minor weight gain, and irregular bleeding. Some OCs may worsen acne and increase migraine headaches.

While OCs are highly effective, it is recommended that women use condoms as a second/backup method to maximize pregnancy prevention AND decrease the risks of STDs.

Q. What is the shelf life of Plan B?

A. Plan B (emergency contraception) can be taken up to one year after it is dispensed, or the expiration date on the package (whichever comes first). If you are a sexually active woman it's a good idea to have Plan B on hand so that you can take it immediately following unprotected intercourse (if a condom breaks, you forgot to use your birth control method, unplanned intercourse, etc.). For more information, visit www.go2planb.com.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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