Before a woman decides on a method of contraception, she should consult a health care provider with questions and concerns. This brochure provides answers to commonly asked questions regarding birth control pills (BCP); however, it is not a substitute for a visit with a health care provider and specific pill package inserts.

Types of birth control pills

- Combination pill - contain the hormones estrogen and progestin. Combination birth control pills offer health benefits to some women; they help protect against ovarian and endometrial cancer.

- Progestin-only pill ("minipills") - do not contain estrogen. This type of pill is a better choice for women who have certain health problems and cannot take pills with estrogen. It is often recommended for women who are breastfeeding.

Advantages and disadvantages of taking birth control pills:

Advantages:

- Reduces risk of ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer
- Decreases menstrual blood flow, pain and cramps
- Lessens premenstrual symptoms
- Regulates menstrual cycle
- May improve acne
- Reduces risk of ovarian cysts

Disadvantages:

- Must remember to take daily
- Need to use back up birth control when pills are missed
- Requires a prescription
- Can be costly
- Various health risks and side effects

How effective is the pill in preventing an unplanned pregnancy?

When taken correctly, the pill can be 95-99.9% effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy.

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Who should not use the pill?
Women who are considering taking the pill should contact a health care provider to discuss medical history as well as the risks associated with the pill. In general, it is advised that women with the following conditions should not take the pill:

- History of heart attack or stroke
- History of blood clots
- History of chest pain
- Known or suspected breast cancer or cancer of the reproductive organs
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)
- Liver cancer
- Known or suspected pregnancy
- An upcoming surgery or prolonged bed rest

Can I use the birth control pill to change the date my period comes or skip it all together?
Several extended hormone pills are on the market now specifically for this purpose. While it is possible to prevent your period with continuous use of some birth control pills, it is best to talk with your health care provider first.

Will I gain weight using a hormonal birth control method?
While weight gain can be a side effect of hormonal methods of birth control, how much a woman will gain tends to vary. Weight gain is due to an increase in appetite and fluid retention as a result of the increase in hormones. Most studies show that the amount of weight gain is small and usually lost after a year of starting the pill.

Can other medicines decrease the effectiveness of BCPs?
Certain medications can interact with birth control pills, making the birth control pills less effective and pregnancy more likely. Spotting or mid-cycle bleeding may be the first sign that an antibiotic is interfering with the effectiveness of your birth control pills. It is generally recommended to use a back-up method of birth control while taking an antibiotic and continue for at least one week afterward. Talk to your doctor if taking other medications while on a birth control pill.

How soon after stopping the birth control pill can you conceive?
You may have only a two-week delay before you ovulate after stopping the pill. On average, your period should start again within three months. It is important to remember that it is possible to become pregnant after you ovulate and without ever having a period at all. Some physicians recommend waiting for at least one normal menstrual cycle before trying to conceive. If you have at least one normal period before conceiving, it will be easier to estimate when you ovulated and when your baby is due.

References
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- www.orthotri-cyclen.com (Ortho Tri-Cyclen)
- www.mayoclinic.com