

Using Hormone-based Birth Control with Other Medications

What is hormone-based birth control?

Oral contraceptives, such as the pill, and the patch are examples of hormone-based birth control.

Hormone-based birth control contains hormones such as estrogen and progestin to prevent pregnancy as follows:

- Stop your ovaries from releasing eggs or ovulation;
- Make the lining of your uterus thinner, so eggs fertilized by a man's sperm cannot attach to your uterus; or
- Make it harder for sperm to get to your eggs.

Can some medications prevent my birth control from working?

Yes. Certain antibiotics and medications may make your hormone-based birth control *not* work properly. Some medications can make it hard for your body to absorb the hormones in your hormone-based birth control. Other medications can make your body get rid of the hormones faster. If either happens, the lower levels of hormones in your body may prevent your birth control from working and result in pregnancy.

Medications that may affect your birth control include:

- Antibiotics such as Rifampin;
- Antifungal agents such as griseofulvin;
- Anticonvulsants (anti-seizure) such as carbamazepine;
- Anti-retrovirals such as ritonavir; and
- Herbal medications such as St. John's wort.

Some medications may also make your birth control stop working, even if you are only taking them for a short time.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist which medications may affect your birth control.

How can I reduce the risk of pregnancy when taking medications and hormone-based birth control?

To reduce the risk of getting pregnant, use a barrier method of birth control, such as a condom, diaphragm or cervical cap, as a back-up in addition to hormone-based birth control. Barrier methods of birth control are not affected by medications.

Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about different birth control options. Ask how long you should use the additional form of birth control, even after you stop taking a medication that affects your birth control.

Always tell your doctor, pharmacist or health professional if you are taking hormone-based birth control.

For more information

For more information on how to prevent pregnancy while taking medications or herbal supplements, speak with your doctor, pharmacist, or public health nurse.

For more BC HealthFile topics, visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
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