

Continuous Birth Control

Hormonal birth control (the pill, patch, and ring) was originally designed to mimic a woman's normal cycle: 21 days of hormone followed by seven days off or of placebo pills. During the first 21 days, the hormones “trick” your body into thinking you are pregnant, preventing ovulation and thinning the lining of the uterus. During the next seven days, when the level of hormones drops off, the ensuing withdrawal bleed mimics a woman's normal menstrual period. This system was designed to keep a woman feeling "normal" or "natural".

In other words, the only reason you have a period while you are taking hormonal birth control is because you stop it. For many women who have severe cramps, heavy bleeding, menstrual migraines, PMS or even endometriosis, *continuous* hormonal birth control can be very beneficial.

You may be asking, “Is it safe not to have a period?” If you are on continuous birth control, the answer is, “absolutely!” As we said before, the hormones in the pill trick your body into thinking it is pregnant. You don't have a period when you are pregnant

Hormonal birth control is associated with a much lower incidence of ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer. In fact, it is one of the very few medicines known to actually prevent cancer. Breast cancer is essentially unchanged; however cervical cancer is slightly higher on the pills. Why? As far as cervical cancer goes, the birth control is not truly a cause of cancer, but rather it allows the behavior (unprotected intercourse possibly with multiple partners and exposure to HPV) which has been associated with increased risk.

In fact, the newest research being done shows even greater benefit when a woman stays on continuous pills for five years or longer.

Long term use of hormonal birth control is not known to affect fertility, so treatment now should not affect a woman's ability to become pregnant in the future. It is important to note, however, that if hormonal birth control was started to regulate irregular periods and there is difficulty conceiving after discontinuing it, most likely the problem is due to the irregular periods and NOT the hormonal birth control.

You may be more likely to have a small amount of spotting, or breakthrough bleeding, while using your birth control continuously. This is not dangerous or harmful. You will be less likely to have this problem if you try to take pills at the same time every day or change your patch or ring at the same time on the same day.

You have two options to deal with spotting. 1. You can try to ignore it and it will likely resolve in a few days. 2. If the spotting is persistent *and it bothers you*, try discontinuing the hormones for NO MORE that 4 days and allow yourself to have a small period, then resume, even if you are still bleeding . (Make sure that you have been on the hormones for at least 3 weeks in a row before allowing a withdrawal bleed to ensure protection from pregnancy!)