

Birth control pill: Effective in first month? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What are the statistics for birth control pill failure in the first month that you start taking it?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It is difficult to provide exact statistics on failure rates for birth control pills in the first month. However, it is always recommended to use a back-up method of birth control until you've completed your first pack, such as a condom, diaphragm, or cervical cap. Back-up BC is necessary because there is a chance that you ovulated (released an egg) before you took your first pill. Therefore, there could be an egg waiting to be fertilized without you even knowing it. After that first pill pack, the hormones present in the birth control pills should prevent you from ovulating altogether (assuming you take the pills correctly), thus contributing to pregnancy prevention.

Most birth control pills rely on the action of the hormone, estrogen, which essentially inhibits the release of an egg from the ovary. Combination pills that contain estrogen and progestin (a synthetic version of the hormone, progesterone) might provide a little more protection in the first few weeks. This is because progestin decreases the ability of sperm to penetrate the cervical mucus (in order to swim through the uterus and fallopian tubes to fertilize an egg), and alters the lining of the uterus so that it is more difficult for a fertilized egg to implant in the uterus. You can read [How do birth control pills work?](#) ^[2] to learn more.

In addition, it is also a good idea to keep a back-up method of birth control on hand (such as a condom). This is wise to have, just in case you forget to take your pill and want to have sex, or if you're taking antibiotics that could lower the effectiveness of the pill. Check out [Antibiotics and hormonal birth control effectiveness](#) ^[3] for more information.

Alice!

Category:

[Sexual & Reproductive Health](#) ^[4]

[Contraception](#) ^[5]

[Birth Control Pills](#) ^[6]

Related questions

[Girlfriend on the pill still worried about pregnancy](#) [7]

[Puttin' a ring on it... The NuvaRing that is!](#) [8]

[Birth control pill for acne: Will it also protect against pregnancy?](#) [9]

[Taking birth control pills ? What counts as the "same time" every day?](#) [10]

Published date:

Apr 11, 1997

Last reviewed on:

Jul 10, 2015

Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
 - [Content Use](#)
 - [Media Inquiries](#)
 - [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
 - [Licensing Q&As](#)
 - [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
 - [Full Site Syndication](#)
 - [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please [visit our Emergency page](#) to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/birth-control-pill-effective-first-month>

Links

[1] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/birth-control-pill-effective-first-month>

[2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/how-do-birth-control-pills-work>

[3] <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/antibiotics-and-hormonal-birth-control-effectiveness>

[4] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sexual-reproductive-health>

[5] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/contraception>

[6] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/birth-control-pills>

[7] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/girlfriend-pill-still-worried-about-pregnancy>

[8] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/puttin-ring-it-nuvaring>

[9] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/birth-control-pill-acne-will-it-also-protect-against-pregnancy>

[10] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/taking-birth-control-pills-%E2%80%94-what-counts-same-time-every-day>