Dear Alice,

This may seem a ridiculous question, but here goes. I have a trip planned to Hawaii and just realized that during my vacation time, I am scheduled to be on my period. Needless to say, that will definitely slow down my plans for ocean swimming and loads of tropical sex with my boyfriend. Is there a way to safely alter my cycle by missing birth control pills or other means?

— Hawaii-bound

Answer

Dear Hawaii-bound,

You’re likely not the only one who’s interested in rescheduling their period, so thank you for the question! Whether it’s during vacation, on your wedding night, when you get to visit with a long distance partner, or any other time, having your period may feel like it’s interrupting your mojo. The good news is that there are a few options for delaying your period — some of which are intended to reduce the number of periods you have in a year. If that isn’t what you’re looking for, you can also reschedule your period using the birth control pills you’re already on, using a vaginal ring, getting a hormonal IUD, or getting an injection. Read on for more details about how each of these can be used to delay your period.

Hormonal birth control options can often be used to delay your period, and chances are that if your health care provider indicated that it was safe for you to be on it, using it to delay your period may be okay. That being said, before making any changes, it’s wise to speak with a health care provider about which option may work best for you. They may be able to advise you best given your particular health history. When using hormonal options, the methods to delaying a period include:

- **Hormonal birth control pills:** If you’re already using a combination pill containing estrogen and progestin, it’s designed to have approximately three weeks of hormone pills and one week of inactive pills that don’t contain hormones. During the week sans hormones, the body is able to mimic a period through a process called withdrawal bleeding. If you’d like to avoid that stage, you can skip the week of inactive pills and start with active pills in the next
pack.

- **Vaginal ring**: This is intended to be inserted for three to four weeks then removed for a week to allow for withdrawal bleeding. Instead of leaving the ring out for a week, it's possible to delay your period by switching out the ring every three to five weeks, then immediately replacing it with a new one, leaving no window for withdrawal bleeding.

- **Intrauterine device**: This is a type of long-acting reversible contraceptive that releases a steady amount of hormones over several years. While this device is intended to provide pregnancy prevention, approximately 30 to 50 percent of users report having no periods after two years.

- **Depo-Provera injection**: You could also try a depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA) injection that’s administered every 90 days. Approximately 50 to 75 percent of individuals who've used this long-term birth control option reported having no periods after one year of injections.

Because these strategies manipulate the way the products were designed in order to delay a period, some may be hesitant to use these methods. If that’s the case, then you can be rest assured that there are birth control pills on the market created to be used for extended periods (no pun intended) of time. In fact, there are now extended-cycle birth control pills, approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), that have four or fewer periods per year. If there's enough time between now and your vacation (or if not, to think about in the future), you could consider switching to a pill that gives you fewer periods.

No matter the option you choose, it’s good to keep in mind that there’s always a chance of spotting or breakthrough bleeding, especially in the first few months. There’s some evidence to suggest that over time the body adjusts to the medication and there’ll be fewer spotting incidents. Something else to keep in mind is that delaying your period may make it more difficult to notice if you do become pregnant. While birth control options offer a high rate of effectiveness when used correctly and consistently, there is no 100 percent effective method of preventing pregnancy except for abstinence.

If period postponement doesn’t seem like it’s a good fit for you, it's still possible to enjoy your vacation and explore other sexual activities with your partner. Perhaps this will be an opportunity for you two to connect in new ways!

Alice!

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- Sexual & Reproductive Health
- Contraception
- Birth Control Pills
- Reproduction
- Menstruation
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