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## **Birth control pill for acne: Will it also protect against pregnancy?** <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I recently started taking birth control pills to help with my acne. But since it is considered a low dosage kind (Low Ogestrel, to be specific), I wonder if it is still an effective and safe contraceptive. Can I take this kind and not have to worry about getting pregnant?

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Most birth control pills on the market today are considered low dosage because they contain less estrogen than the earlier types of birth control pills. This decreased amount of estrogen provides the same protection against pregnancy without some of the more common negative side effects that older oral contraceptives used to cause.

One of the side-benefits of birth control pills is the improvement of acne in women who already have skin prone to pimples, which is the reason you're taking Low-Ogestrel. (By the way, unlike birth control pills containing the newer progestin norgestimate, Low-Ogestrel and other pills containing the older progestin norgestrel may cause acne problems in women with clear skin.) Regardless of the reason you've been prescribed Low-Ogestrel, or another birth control pill, it is as effective as a contraceptive as if you were taking it for that purpose, with one caveat: you need to follow the dosage instructions. That generally means taking one pill per day, skipping none, at around the same time each day. For more information, check the insert that came with the pills (or ask your pharmacist for it when you pick up your refill; they must provide it if asked). Low-Ogestrel has an failure rate of 0.1 percent, meaning that one in one thousand of the women taking this pill according to the instructions will become pregnant within the first year of use, which is standard among almost all oral contraceptives. Check the related Q&As and the *Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health* <sup>[2]</sup> archive to get more information on birth control pills in general.

It doesn't appear that you've talked with your health care provider about using the pill as a form of contraception in addition to taking it for treating your acne. This conversation may be a good one

to have with your provider, or with your gynecologist, especially to discuss issues such as back-up contraception. And remember, a birth control pill can prevent pregnancy, but it provides no protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Using a condom will, however, provide reasonable protection against STIs while also acting as a backup method of preventing pregnancy.

Alice!

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