



Pill Amenorrhea

How Birth Control Pills Work

The pill is a synthetic form of the body's own hormones that works by suppressing ovulation - the monthly release of an egg from one of the ovaries. At the beginning of each menstrual cycle, levels of the hormone estrogen begin building. This thickens the endometrium (the lining of the uterus) in preparation for a fertilized egg. Estrogen levels peak and then, at approximately 14 days into the cycle, an egg is released from one of the ovaries. After ovulation, levels of progesterone rise for the next seven days. This further prepares the endometrium for a fertilized egg to attach itself to the endometrium, which is called conception or implantation. If conception does not occur, levels of both estrogen and progesterone drop to their lowest point. This drop signals the thickened uterine lining to slough off, resulting in the monthly period. When a woman is taking the pill, hormone levels are more constant. If there is never a peak of estrogen, there is no signal for the ovary to release an egg. No egg, no fertilization, no pregnancy. During the final week of pills (the placebo pill week – pills without hormones), this drop in hormone level triggers the endometrium to slough off – “a period.”

Pill Amenorrhea (no period on the pill)

With continued use, the lining of the uterus becomes very thin, leading to very light and very often, no menstrual period at all. When the lining of the uterus becomes very thin, there is not enough tissue to shed as a period every month, but the uterus is still healthy. Many women who hemorrhage (bleed very, very heavily) with their menses are treated with birth control pills so that they can have a normal period – the amount that they bleed each month is reduced significantly. When a woman with average menstrual flow takes a pill on a regular basis, she may soon see only a few spots for a menses or even no spotting or discharge at all. As long as a woman takes her pills every day, the same time every day (give or take a couple of hours), there is only a very, very slim chance that not having a period indicates pregnancy. If one is concerned, a home pregnancy test can be taken. Missing periods for up to three months after the pill is stopped is a common experience as well (post pill amenorrhea).