

Coming off hormonal birth control

There are many reasons you may be interested in coming off hormonal contraceptives, but almost everyone who is doing so wants to resume healthy cycles as quickly as possible (either to conceive or to use the sympto-thermal method (STM) of birth control sooner and more easily). You will want to eliminate exogenous hormones from your system as well as provide your body with what it needs to make healthy hormones naturally. Unfortunately, a waiting period is recommended both before pregnancy and before using STM as birth control after coming off of hormonal contraceptives (HC) due to the fact that most people's hormones need time to normalize.

What to expect when coming off hormonal contraceptives

When you are coming off the pill, there are many things you can expect. For one thing, if you had any hormonal imbalances you are still likely to have them. Implementing a healthy diet and lifestyle to support your endocrine system will help any imbalances you may have. When first discontinuing HC, many women may notice things such as: acne, breast changes, a change in sex drive, a lack of cervical fluid, continuous cervical fluid, headaches, heavier or lighter menses, mood changes, more intense cramps, anovulation, painful ovulation, intensified PMS, and spotting or irregular bleeding (adapted from [Coming off the Pill](#)). The good news is, these can also be alleviated by coming off HC, and certainly will be with time if attention is paid to your hormonal health.

Why wait? Why your body needs to rebuild before pregnancy or get back to a healthy hormonal pattern before STM use.

How important is it to wait before trying to get pregnant or using STM as birth control? I would say *very*. It's a good idea to wait for 3 healthy cycles before trying to conceive and to see healthy cycles to use STM as birth control. Some lucky people will resume healthy cycles quickly while for others it may take time. This will depend on many factors including if you were have had a child before HC use, how long you had been taking HC, age you began taking HC, whether you had any irregularities/imbalances before using HC, how your overall health is, and what type of HC you were on. It is of course best to wait to use STM as birth control because your hormones are likely to be off at first. Yes, you may have less days that you are actually fertile (or none!), but you may have continuous cervical fluid, or none. The synthetic hormones can take some time to get out of your system and for you to

get a regular cycles back. For those trying to get pregnant, it is best to wait because the synthetic hormones in HC have not been proven harmless to the fetus, and there is evidence of links between use of HC currently or within 3 months from onset of pregnancy and some defects, and an increased risk of downs syndrome. I suggest using the time to work towards a healthy endocrine system to the best of your ability, as hard as it may be to wait after you have made the decision to have a child.

So how do you get a healthy menstrual cycle back? Definitely try to follow my tips for a healthy balanced endocrine system and in addition, take extra care in a few areas listed below.

Nutrients to focus on:

B Vitamins. The liver uses B vitamins to process hormones so you have been using up extra and need it to get the synthetic hormones out. The B vitamins are a group of vitamins and come in many different foods, but good sources of most of them are: Leafy greens, whole grains, animal products (B12)

Vitamin C. Important for liver health, good sources include all fruits (especially citrus, kiwi, peppers, and berries) and vegetables.

Zinc. Critical for the production and utilization of many hormones. When it is in balance with copper, iron, and manganese it helps prevent ovarian cysts. Good foods include oysters, fish, red meat, and pumpkin seeds (Though the seeds should be soaked in order for proper utilization of nutrients).

Magnesium. Required for the production of ovarian hormones. Good sources are kelp, leafy greens, nettle, cocoa powder, and many nuts and seeds.

Vitamin A. Critical for good reproductive health on many levels. Good sources are cod liver oil, liver, fish, kidney, butter, and whole milk.

Fats. Avoid the "yellow" fats that are commonly used such as soybean (aka vegetable oil), corn, canola, safflower, etc. Instead favor organic/naturally raised animal fats, extra virgin olive oil, virgin coconut oil, and organic/naturally raised butter. Ensure good intake of omega 3s by avoiding grain fed animals/animal fats and eating fish and/or fish oil regularly. Do not use trans fats, anything hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated is not your friend.

Lifestyle factors:

Sleep in darkness

Exercise vigorously a few times a week

avoid endocrine disruptors/xenoestrogens

Get lots of water and rest

Consider a cleanse

Support your liver!

Consider herbs that are good for your liver

Eat/take bitters

Drink lemon water in the morning

Avoid alcohol

Avoid xenoestrogens

Avoid sugar, trans-fats

What does a healthy cycle look like?

In a healthy cycle, you will see a temperature shift indicating ovulation, followed by *at least* 10 high temperatures indicating a healthy luteal phase. You will see a healthy cervical fluid pattern that lines up with your temperature shift and eggwhite cervical fluid will be seen as your peak fluid. Ideally, you will not have split peaks regularly before ovulation. It is best to wait for these signs before using the STM as birth control and a couple cycles like this before trying to conceive.

Recommended Reading

Coming off the Pill, the Patch, the Shot, and Other Hormonal Contraceptives – Megan LaLonde and Geraldine Matus

The Pill: Are you sure it's for you? - Alexandra Pope and Jane Bennett

Fertility, Cycles, and Nutrition – Marilyn Shannon

Much information adapted from *Coming off the Pill, the Patch, the Shot, and Other Hormonal Contraceptives*.