Dear Alice,

I would like to know about the Yasmin birth control pill. What are the benefits and the side effects?

Answer

Dear Reader,

With such a plethora of birth control options, where’s a woman to start?! Yasmin, not to be confused with Yaz, is a low-dose pill approved for use in the U.S. in 2001. This pill is no spring chicken in the birth control world, so fortunately, there’s a good deal of information on its risks and benefits. Known as a combination oral contraceptive because it contains both progestin and estrogen, Yasmin prevents pregnancy by inhibiting ovulation, just like other birth control pills. When used correctly, Yasmin is 99 percent effective, (meaning one in 100 women may become pregnant in the first year of using this particular pill). Yasmin is generally viewed as safe and effective, and its use has a number of benefits (more on those in a bit). However, it’s also good to know that compared to other oral contraceptives, Yasmin may increase the risk of blood clots, depression, and skin changes.

What makes the brand name Yasmin, and her generic-version sisters, Ocella, Syeda, and Zarah, unique is the use of the progestin drospirenone, making it an alternative for those who experience side effects with contraceptives containing other types of progestin. Drospirenone is also used in a lower-dose formula called Yaz (made by the same company and is often confused with Yasmin), whose chemical composition leads to a shorter cycle. The side effects and benefits of Yaz may be different, so a health care provider would be able to help you sort out whether Yaz, Yasmin, or another choice is best for you.

The most well-known benefit of using Yasmin is, of course, pregnancy prevention. What some people may not realize is that it may provide a few additional perks:

- **Decreased endometrium thickness**: Yasmin may have an effect on decreasing the thickness of uterine tissue. This can have two exciting benefits: lowered risk for endometrial cancer and lighter periods.
- **Cycle control**: As with any oral contraceptive, Yasmin gives you a bit more predictability about when Aunt Flo is going to arrive. Some women taking Yasmin may
not have any bleeding at all during the placebo days, while others may experience some irregular spotting. Researchers have found that Yasmin generally allows for relatively light and manageable periods.

- **Fewer PMS symptoms**: PMS is no walk in the park [5]. In addition to lighter menstrual bleeding, women taking Yasmin (or her sister generic pills) often report fewer headaches and cramps as well as less swelling, acne, and nausea.

That bit about fewer PMS symptoms may have you bounding to your health care provider for a prescription, but there are a few side effects that prospective Yasmin users may want to learn about first:

- **PMS-like symptoms**: Yep, that’s right. Yasmin can both reduce PMS symptoms and lead to an increase in unpleasant PMS-like symptoms, depending on the woman. These could include headache, breast pain, nausea, abdominal pain, and mood changes.

- **Blood clots**: Many combination birth control pills can increase your risk of blood clots [6], including serious conditions like pulmonary embolisms or deep vein thrombosis. Studies show that compared to not taking the pill, or taking pills with progestins such as levonorgestrel, Yasmin users had a slightly higher risk of blood clots.

- **Depression**: Individuals who have had depression in the past may experience a recurrence when on Yasmin, and are advised to talk with their health care provider if there are any concerns.

- **Skin changes**: Yasmin may cause changes such as dark, blotchy spots or eruptions of the skin.

Any birth control option – from condoms, to IUDs [7], to birth control pills – can have risks and benefits. Keeping this in mind, the risks associated with pills containing drospirenone are greater for women who smoke, or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol. Moreover, these types of pills are not recommended for women who have liver or renal issues; a history of heart disease, blood clots, or strokes; have had breast cancer; or are currently pregnant. Yasmin might also react with some medications, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), heparin, or potassium supplements, so it’s recommended that you triple check with your health care provider or pharmacist that taking Yasmin alongside any other medications will be A-OK.

Starting or switching contraceptives can involve not only weighing the pros and cons, but also a little patience as you figure out what works best for you. In addition to chatting with your health care provider, you may find some of the information in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual & Reproductive Health archives [8] helpful in your quest for your ultimate contraceptive soulmate, whether she’s Yasmin or one of the many other ladies in the contraceptive crew [9].

Alice!

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