Can you order birth control pills over the Internet without a prescription or examination? [1]

Dear Alice,

I've heard that you could order oral contraceptives over the Internet without having a prescription or an examination. Is this true and if it is, where do I order them?

Answer

Dear Reader,

What you've heard is partially true - birth control pills can be ordered online through various platforms. However, to have safe, legal, and effective pills delivered to you, a reputable Internet company will always require a prescription. In some instances, birth control prescriptions can be filled through an online pharmacy. Additionally, some people use telemedicine, which is connecting with health providers through phone, web, or video, to get birth control. If they are being prescribed or purchased through an online telemedicine provider, some form of consultation with one of the platform's health care providers may also be required (although a physical exam may not be necessary). Telemedicine is regulated state by state, so the rules and regulations regarding this process differ depending on where you live in the United States. Nevertheless, if you choose your platform carefully and a health care provider deems it appropriate, you'll have the convenience of birth control pills delivered to you with just a few clicks of your mouse or taps of your finger.

A number of online platforms exist through which people can get a prescription for many forms of birth control, including the pill, patch, and ring. While not requiring a physical exam, an online telemedicine provider may require that you have some form of consultation with one of their health care providers. Depending on the platform and the laws associated with such services in your state, a required consultation could be anything from a one of the platform's providers reviewing an online questionnaire that you fill out to having a video conference with a health care provider that works for the telemedicine company. After the provider has completed their evaluation, if they deem it appropriate, they'll write the prescription to be conveniently delivered to your home or local pharmacy. Even though oral contraceptives are safe and effective for millions of people, other people risk illness or complications by taking hormonal birth control. That's why having a consultation with a health care provider is key, as opposed to only interacting with an online company; a medical professional can advise you on risks and safety concerns associated with the birth control pill based on your personal health history and current health status. For example, if you have certain pre-existing conditions,
such as a history of blood clots, high blood pressure, or liver disease, taking oral contraceptives may increase the risk to your health.

If you aren’t obtaining your birth control through an online telemedicine platform and instead are filling a prescription through an online pharmacy, make sure the site’s pharmacy requires a valid prescription in order to dispense medications. An unverified Internet provider may send you expired or recalled medication; thus, while the potential cost-savings and convenience of the Internet pharmacy may be enticing, it’s wise to only order medication from trustworthy platforms for your own health and safety. Also, keep in mind that even if you’ve had a prescription for the pill in the past, the state of your health may change. When prescriptions expire or run out, a health care provider may need to reassess and determine if the birth control you are using is still appropriate for your health needs before writing the prescription.

If you’re wondering about costs or if you don’t have health insurance, there are organizations such as Planned Parenthood that operate on a sliding scale and will provide free or low-cost health care and prescriptions, while others have low flat rates for those without insurance. Additionally, you can check out the Go Ask Alice! Contraception category for more information about birth control and how to get it. For birth control pills and any other prescription medication, it’s smart to go the extra mile and find a reputable online platform — your health is always worth the extra effort!

Alice!
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Published date:
Dec 14, 2000
Last reviewed on:
Oct 06, 2017

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