

Whether you're interested in coming off of hormonal birth control because you want to start trying to get pregnant or you want to explore hormone-free birth control options, it's important to know what to expect. When you stop using hormonal birth control, it can affect your body in many ways, and the more prepared you are, the easier the transition may be. Here are six steps to help you get off of hormonal birth control and start moving to a more natural menstrual cycle.

1. Talk to Your Doctor

Once you've decided that you're interested in stopping your hormonal birth control, the first step should be to discuss your plan with your doctor. Depending on what birth control you've been using, there may be potential side effects that you need to be aware of and you may want to discuss your other options for birth control or how soon you may be able to get pregnant.

Keep in mind that many traditional women's healthcare providers may not be familiar with natural birth control options and may caution you against stopping your current birth control. While it's important to listen to the advice of your doctor, your health, body and what decisions you make with them are ultimately up to you. Your main goal from this conversation should be to get a solid understanding of what's involved in stopping your current birth control and what's normal and what's not during the transition period.

2. Put a Plan in Place

Once you know what to expect, it's important to put a plan together. If you're not trying to get pregnant right away, you will need to have an alternate method of birth control, whether that's fertility charting or using a barrier method. It can also be a good idea to schedule hobbies and activities you like and make a concerted effort to support your mental, physical and emotional well-being as your body adjusts back to its natural cycle.

You may also want to create a plan for how you want to deal with and prepare for any potential side effects. Anytime you are changing your hormone levels, it can cause everything from mood swings and cravings to period pain or changes in bleeding patterns. You may want to talk with your partner or others you live with to let them know what's going on. Understanding what's going on can help others be more supportive and less likely to take hormone-related mood swings personally.

3. Stop Using Your Hormonal Birth Control

This is where it gets real. No matter how much research you've done or how prepared you feel, it's normal to be a little nervous or worried when you actually stop using hormonal birth control. If you've been taking a pill or using a patch or shot, stopping birth control may be as simple as just not taking your pills anymore or not getting another patch or shot from your doctor.

If you have an IUD or the implant, you'll need to schedule a removal procedure with your doctor. On rare occasions, there can be complications if the IUD or implant has migrated to another part of the body, so it's important to discuss what might happen and potential next steps with your doctor before the procedure so you have an action plan moving forward.

4. Track Your Fertility Signs and Cycle Symptoms

Hormonal birth control may seem like it regulates your period, but this isn't the case. It actually stops your natural menstrual cycle entirely, and any bleeding you experience as a period is actually just bleeding that occurs from estrogen withdrawal. If you've been on birth control for a long time or didn't pay much attention to your cycle before, it may take some time to get familiar with your natural cycle.

Tracking your cycle can help you better understand what's happening every month and let you positively identify when ovulation happens and the four phases of your menstrual cycle. If you went off of birth control to get pregnant or because you wanted to switch to a hormone-free option, charting your fertility signs — such as basal body temperature and cervical fluid — is crucial. But even if you're not, charting your cycle for a few months after you go off of birth control can help you know for sure when your cycle has normalised and you are ovulating regularly. It can also help you get familiar with your unique cycle and the other signs it brings.

5. Shape Up Your Cycle

Now that you know what your natural cycle looks like and what symptoms you may be dealing with, you can start taking steps to improve your health, balance your hormones and have a better period. It's normal for your cycle to be off for a month or two — or even several months if you've been on the shot — so make sure to give yourself enough time to see what your natural menstrual cycle looks like over several months before looking for patterns.

Once you have identified certain problem symptoms, you can start to address them. For example, maybe you find that you have increased period pain and cramps in your natural cycle. Making some lifestyle changes to avoid processed foods and to prioritise exercise and sleep may help. And if you keep tracking your cycle as you make those changes, you can get real feedback on how effective those changes are for your body.

6. Consider Sharing Your Story

Women often feel like hormonal birth control is their only option for preventing pregnancy or lessening their period symptoms. Sharing your story, from why you decided to stop using hormonal birth control to how you managed your cycle symptoms, can help the women in your inner circle or wider community get more information and perspectives on birth control and what their options are for naturally managing their cycles.

If you're ready to learn more about your menstrual cycle, including options for hormone-free birth control or tips for getting pregnant, [CLIENT] can help. Our courses are designed to give you all the information you need to better understand your cycle and start working with it instead of covering it up.