

What I Can Tell You About The Birth Control Pill and Acne Prone Skin

In general, acne is a hormonally regulated disorder. Dermatologists recognize acne to be a disease of the sebaceous or oil glands and these oil glands are under the regulation of the body's hormones, most well known being testosterone. Testosterone is what we call an androgen and androgens stimulate the sebaceous gland to produce oil. This is going to make acne worse in those who are prone to it.

The birth control pill (BCP for short!) is usually some mixture of hormones that work by essentially fooling the body into thinking that it is pregnant, so that you do not become pregnant while on it. (Yes, this is a simplistic analogy but for the purposes of this blog article, it works fine!). But what about acne, do BCPs reduce acne? The answer is...it depends.

First of all, let's talk about whether taking BCPs is for every woman who wants it, whether it be for acne control or for oral contraception. The answer is a resounding NO. The Pill has some serious side effects, most notably blood clots, (which can lead to strokes, pulmonary emboli, and heart attacks), high blood pressure and a list of side effects that you must read to believe. The reality is though, if you are not a smoker, do not have hypertension, do not have a personal or family history of ovarian, breast or uterine cancer, have had no migraine headaches or cardiovascular or neurological history, and do not have any genetic tendencies to overly clottable blood, the side effects, if any can be dealt with. (Now for the legal disclaimer: Do not consider this medical advice. Speak to the doctor who is actually prescribing you BCPs so he or she can go over all of the possibilities. What I am writing about in this article is generic information, not specifically for your case! Ok, now I will continue...).

So, if you are a candidate for taking the BCP, will it make your acne prone skin less acne prone? Well...it depends! Over the years, I have noticed that girls who are placed on the BCP may notice one of a few things happening: a) they may notice that their skin initially gets worse for a few weeks or even months, then gets better; b) they may notice that their skin initially gets worse, then more or less goes back to the same pre- BCP pattern; c) the taking of the BCP may not affect their skin at all; d) their skin may steadily improve. Now all of this depends on the type or brand of BCP that has been prescribed. There are some Pills that are simply better for the skin and some that seem to not be. In fact, there are some Pills that are FDA approved for acne control, and others that lack this approval.

Is the BCP used to help acne prone skin without using other medications? Generally no. Generally speaking, the usual (if there is such a thing nowadays) acne medications are given in addition, or more likely *prior* to taking the BCP and continued. Some girls want to know if there are certain types of acne lesion that are more likely to be helped by BCPs than other types of lesions. The answer to this is that it seems that both inflammatory and non inflammatory acne lesions are benefited, in those who improve at all.

The last question you might wonder about is whether one who is on a BCP for acne prone skin is able to do all of the “bad” things for their skin without worry? Simple answer: No! Squeezing, picking, rough scrubbing, heavy makeup, oily moisturizers, etc are all going to make your acne worse, with or without BCP.

So, are BCPs for you, with your acne prone skin? If you are medically a candidate (read this by meaning you are not in a high-risk group for side-effects), and you are under the care of a board certified dermatologist who is prescribing the routine medications...and you are using them reliably, then a trial of one of the BCPs may be worth undertaking. You will, however, have to be patient to see whether it is helpful or not!