

Hormonal methods of contraception

Progestin-only oral contraceptives or “the minipill” contains only progestin (a female hormone). The method, when used daily, is highly effective for breastfeeding women. This method of contraception has a slightly higher failure rate than oral contraceptives contain both estrogen and progestin. But during breastfeeding, women are not as fertile. A small amount of hormone passes into the breast milk but has no known effects on the infant. Indeed, some studies have suggested a good effect on the quality and quantity of breast milk. When the woman stops breastfeeding the baby, some clinicians suggest switching to combination oral contraceptives which have a slightly higher effectiveness.

Combination Oral Contraceptive or “the pill” contains both estrogen and progestin. The American Academy of Pediatrics has approved the use of low dose oral contraceptives in breastfeeding women once milk production is well established. If oral contraceptives are chosen, they can be started six weeks after birth.

Some clinicians prefer breastfeeding women use non-hormonal methods or the minipill because estrogen has been shown to reduce the milk supply. While small amounts of hormones may pass to the infant through breast milk, no detrimental effects to infants has been observed. A long term Swedish study has found no harmful effects on the development of children whose mothers used oral contraceptives during breastfeeding.

Subdermal Implants consist of 6 capsules inserted just beneath the skin of a woman’s upper arm. They contain the hormone levonorgestrel, a female hormone. They do not effect the growth or health of breastfed infants. In many countries, capsules are inserted immediately after birth. In the U.S., Food and Drug Administration guidelines recommend waiting 6 weeks until nursing is well established.

Injectable Contraception or “the shot” can be safely used during breastfeeding and does not suppress milk production. At least one study suggests that this method of contraception may have a beneficial effect on the quality of breast milk in terms of its fat concentration, calories, minerals and protein composition.

REMEMBER: If you are at risk of a sexually transmitted disease (STD), use latex condoms to protect yourself. Sexually transmitted infections can happen to anyone who is sexually active, even during breastfeeding. Don’t stop taking or using your birth control method on your own. Always call your clinician to talk things over.