

# Free the Pill

**The evidence is clear:**

## **It's time for over-the-counter birth control pills**

We want a future where everyone has the freedom to make decisions about their own health and lives with dignity and respect, and equitable access to birth control is critical to making this a reality. Birth control pills are an important part of the full range of sexual and reproductive health care and are one of the best-studied medicines on the market today, yet there are too many barriers to access them. [Decades of research](#) show that birth control pills are safe and effective for over-the-counter (OTC) use, and making them available OTC would help bridge gaps in access and give people greater control over their reproductive health and lives.

### **Birth control pills are safe, effective, and commonly used**

Birth control pills have been used for more than 60 years and we have extensive research and experience confirming that birth control pills are [safe and effective](#) in preventing pregnancy as well as in managing health conditions. Birth control pills—which are [99% effective](#) when used exactly as directed and 91% effective with typical use—[are just as safe, if not safer](#), than many other OTC products already available. While birth control pills may not be appropriate for everyone, research shows that people are able to determine if an OTC pill is right for them by self-screening for contraindications using a [simple checklist](#), and can consult with a health care provider if they have any questions.

This was demonstrated in a study that compared the experiences of women\* living along the US-Mexico border in El Paso, TX, who obtained birth control pills without a prescription in Mexican pharmacies to those who got birth control pills by prescription from clinics in El Paso. The study found that [less than 1%](#) of birth control pill users had a contraindication to progestin-only pills (POPs), and there were no significant differences in the prevalence of contraindications to POPs between OTC and clinic users. The study also found [no significant difference](#) in the prevalence of absolute contraindications to combined oral contraceptives (that is, conditions under which birth control pills should not at all be used) between those who got birth control pills OTC versus at a clinic.

Each month, [14% of women\\* aged 15-49](#) in the United States take birth control pills—that's over 10 million people—making it the most commonly used reversible contraceptive method.

*\* The term 'women' is used in reference to research studies that identified the gender of participants as 'women'. We acknowledge that using 'women' may be inaccurate if participants were not asked or allowed to provide their gender and that these data limitations may exclude the experiences of some people seeking contraception who do not identify as 'women', such as non-binary or transgender individuals.*

## Research supports the switch to OTC status for people of all ages

[A pelvic exam is neither medically necessary](#) nor required to start taking birth control pills, and there is no medical reason to obtain a prescription before starting, refilling, or switching birth control pills. In fact, research shows that requiring a prescription makes it harder for people to [obtain](#) and [consistently use](#) birth control pills. In a [nationally representative survey](#), nearly 30% of women\* who had ever tried to get prescription birth control said they faced obstacles.

Research indicates that birth control pills meet the United States Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) criteria for OTC status—[users are able](#) to determine if they are at risk of unintended pregnancy and [self-screen](#) for contraindications without involving a clinician. Further [research](#) required by the FDA for an over-the-counter switch will evaluate users' ability to safely follow the simple instructions on the label—take one pill at about the same time each day.

In addition, [research supports](#) the safety and effectiveness of adolescent access to OTC birth control pills as well as the need. And [evidence suggests](#) that contraindications to birth control pills are rarer among adolescents compared to adults.

## Medical experts support OTC birth control pills

Given the safety, efficacy, and many health and other benefits of access to birth control pills, major medical organizations like the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#), the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#), and the [American Medical Association](#) support making birth control pills available OTC. Prominent medical and health profession associations are [members of the Free the Pill coalition](#) which has been working since 2004 to bring birth control pills OTC in the United States that are affordable, fully covered by insurance, and accessible to people of all ages.

## The evidence is clear

Six decades of research and experience demonstrate that birth control pills are safe and effective for OTC use, and medical experts agree. Moving birth control pills over the counter and ensuring they're affordable, fully covered by insurance, and available to people of all ages, identities, and backgrounds would have a sweeping impact on people across the country.

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### About Free the Pill

Free the Pill, operated by [Ibis Reproductive Health](#), is a campaign to educate and engage in support of over-the-counter (OTC) birth control pills in the United States that are affordable, fully covered by insurance, and available to people of all ages. Campaign activities are driven by a coalition of more than 150 reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations, research and advocacy groups, youth activists, health care providers, prominent medical and health profession associations, and other professionals, who have been working since 2004 to build the evidence in support of OTC birth control pills in the United States.