



Drospirenone-Containing Birth Control Pills (Yaz, Yasmin, Ocella, Gianvi and their generics)

Drospirenone is a progestin component of some birth control pills that does some blocking of testosterone (the "male hormone" that women have, too, and the hormone that can be a part of making acne worse). This is why drospirenone-containing birth control pills are especially good at helping acne (and why they can theoretically help hirsutism and female-pattern scalp hair loss as well). Drospirenone is also a mild diuretic and is why these birth control pills do not cause the water weight gain that some birth control pills can.

Any birth control pill can theoretically help acne just by evening out hormonal fluctuations, but for many birth control pills, the effects on acne is very minimal. Which birth control pills are most likely to help acne? Some birth control pills are more like testosterone and some are less like testosterone. The ones that are less like testosterone can theoretically help acne more. The drospirenone-containing birth control pills go one step further by blocking testosterone, and may show the most benefit on clearing acne.

Drospirenone is a progestin that is derived from 17-alpha-spironolactone and is chemically related to the diuretic spironolactone. Spironolactone is a diuretic (used for high blood pressure) that is sometimes used off-label for the treatment of acne, hirsutism or female-pattern hair loss. Often people say that a drospirenone-containing birth control pill may be equivalent to 25mg of spironolactone.

Risks:

Any estrogen-containing birth control pill increases the risk of a high blood pressure, stroke, or other life-threatening blood clot, and one study showed possibly a slightly higher risk with a drospirenone-containing birth control pill. The risk is still exceedingly small. To put it in perspective, a healthy pregnant woman is at much greater risk of a life-threatening blood clot than a healthy non-pregnant woman on a birth control pill. Some women are at increased risk of blood clots anyway and these are women who we recommend do not take a birth control pill (nor get pregnant without being followed by an obstetrician who follows high-risk pregnancies). Women who are at risk of blood clots include women who smoke, women with a family history of blood clots, women with a clotting factor disorder, women with a family history of frequent miscarriages, obese women, women with high blood pressure, women over age 35 and women with cancer.

Drospirenone is a potassium-sparing diuretic (so it is not like diuretics that cause the loss of potassium and require a potassium supplement). So theoretically if a patient is on a drospirenone-containing birth control pill (or on spironolactone) and another medicine that is potassium-sparing, the blood potassium can go too high. So tell any doctor who is prescribing you a medicine that you are on a drospirenone-containing birth control pill. NSAID's like ibuprofen are potassium-sparing as well. You are allowed to take intermittent, low-dose ibuprofen if you are on a potassium-sparing diuretic. However, if you need to go on high-dose ibuprofen, please tell me as we will probably do a simple blood test to check your potassium level.