



The Potency of Androgen and Estrogen in Different Brands of the Pill

From Cathy Wong, N.D., Your Guide to Alternative Medicine.

Today, many experts believe that the differences between different types of oral contraceptives (also known as birth control pills) are negligible, because the dosage of pills today is so much lower compared to older, higher dose pills.

In my clinical experience, some women have side effects, ranging from increased frequency of yeast infections to worsening of acne. Every woman responds differently. The different pills as well as the different contraceptive alternatives should be considered.

Estrogen Potency

Ethinyl estradiol is the type of synthetic estrogen found in oral contraceptives. The higher the number of micrograms of ethinyl estradiol, the more potent the estrogenic effect.

Estrogen (ethinyl estradiol) level of oral contraceptives:

- 20 mcg - Alesse®, Levlite®, Loestrin 1/20® Fe, Mircette®, Ortho Evra® (patch)
- 20/30/35 mcg phasic - Estrostep® Fe
- 30 mcg - Levlen®, Levora®, Nordette®, Lo/Ovral®, Desogen®, Ortho-Cept®, Loestrin® 1.5/30, Yasmin®
- 30/40/30 mcg phasic - Triphasil®, Tri-Levlen®, Trivora®
- 35 mcg - Ortho-Cyclen®, Ovcon-35®, Brevicon®, Modicon®, Necon®, Norethin®, Norinyl® 1/35, Ortho-Novum® 1/35, Demulen® 1/35, Zovia® 1/35E
- 35/35/35 mcg phasic - Ortho-Tri-Cyclen®, Ortho-Novum® 7/7/7, TriNorinyl®
- 50 mcg - Necon® 1/50, Norinyl® 1/50, Ortho-Novum® 1/50, Ovcon-50®, Ovral®, Demulen® 1/50, Zovia® 1/50E

Progestin Potency

Unlike the estrogen in oral contraceptives, the explanation of progestin content is more complicated. There are different types of progestins, and each has a different potency in terms of progesterone and androgenic activity.

The pills with higher androgen activity and low estrogen content are most likely to promote acne and excessive hair growth in people with these tendencies. Some of these pills are:

- Loestrin® 1.5/30
- Loestrin® 1/20 Fe
- Estrostep® Fe
- Levlen®
- Alesse®
- Ovral®
- Norlestrin® 1/50

They are usually not recommended for people with conditions of androgen excess, such as polycystic ovarian syndrome.

This is a guideline to show you how the different types of oral contraceptives combinations of hormones can be used to address side effects and health concerns:

- **Acne** - Acne is associated with higher levels of androgens. Oral contraceptives with higher estrogen and lower androgen potency are usually recommended, such as Yasmin®, Demulen® 1/50, Ortho-Tri Cyclen®, Ortho-Cyclen®, Yasmin®, Brevicon®, Modicon®, Necon®, Ortho Evra®, Mircette®
- **Endometriosis** - For endometriosis, an oral contraceptive with lower estrogen, higher progestin potency, and higher androgen potency is often recommended, such as Loestrin® 1.5/30, Loestrin® 1/20 Fe, LoOvral®, Levlen®, Levora®, Nordette®, Demulen® 1/35, Zovia® 1/35.
- **Severe menstrual cramps** - For severe menstrual cramps, an oral contraceptive with higher progestin potency is often recommended, such as Yasmin®, Desogen®, Ortho-Cept®, Mircette®, Loestrin® 1.5/30, Demulen® 1/35, Zovia® 1/35E, Demulen® 1/50, Zovia® 1/50E.
- **Breakthrough bleeding** - For breakthrough bleeding, oral contraceptives with higher estrogen, higher progestin potency, and lower androgen potency are usually recommended, such as Yasmin®, Demulen® 1/50, Zovia® 1/50E, Ovcon® 50, Desogen®, Ortho-Cept®, Estrostep® Fe, Loestrin® 1/20
- **Depression** - For depression, an oral contraceptive with lower progestin potency are often recommended, such as Ortho Evra®, Ovcon® 35, Ortho-TriCyclen®, Ortho-Cyclen®, Brevicon®, Modicon®, Necon® 1/35, Alesse®, Levlite®, Tri-Levlen®, Triphasil®, Trivora®.