What hormones are in birth control pills?

Birth control pills (also called oral contraceptives or hormonal contraceptives) are the most commonly used form of birth control in the United States. Most common birth control pills contain a combination of two hormones, estrogen and progestin (although some pills contain only progestin).

Most women take low-dose birth control pills, which have 50 micrograms or less of estrogen. Modern birth control pills contain 20 to 50 micrograms of estrogen – more than 50 micrograms is considered “high-dose.” Older birth control pills contained up to 5 times as much estrogen and 10 times as much progestin as modern pills. Because studies found that these older pills caused serious complications including stroke, heart attack, and blood clots in the lungs (*pulmo nary embolism*
), the amounts of hormones were reduced.

Do birth control pills affect heart disease risk?

For women who do not have serious risk factors for heart disease, low-dose birth control pills do not pose a risk for heart disease. The same is true for women who wear a birth control patch, another type of hormonal contraceptive, which releases about the same amount of estrogen as low-dose birth control pills. Older birth control pills were found to increase the risk of heart attack by as much as 2.5 times, but evidence indicates that newer pills are safe.[1, 2]

Women who use high-dose pills (>50 micrograms of estrogen) are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke because blood clots are more likely to form in the blood vessels.[3] There is controversy over whether the modern low-dose pill (