

What are birth control pills?

The birth control pill is made up of hormones called estrogen and progesterone. Your body makes similar hormones naturally to control fertility and your period.

How does it work?

It prevents ovulation (your body releasing an egg). Your body normally releases an egg each month, but when there is no egg, you can't get pregnant. It also thickens cervical fluid which prevents sperm from entering the uterus.

How well does it work?

The pill is 97-99.9% effective if used perfectly; typically it is about 95% effective.

What are the advantages of the pill?

- ⊗ Less acne (pimples)
- ⊗ Periods are shorter, lighter, and regular
- ⊗ Less cramping with periods
- ⊗ Nothing to put in place before sex
- ⊗ Protects against: ovarian and endometrial cancers, pelvic inflammatory disease, non-cancerous breast tumors, and ovarian cysts.
- ⊗ Prevents iron deficiency anemia.

What are the disadvantages of the pill?

Occasionally you will have side effects the first 3 months that will go away if you continue to take your pills on time. If problems last, there may be a different brand of pills that will work better for you. Possible side effects include:

- ⊗ Spotting or bleeding between periods
- ⊗ Nausea or upset stomach.
- ⊗ Headaches
- ⊗ Breast tenderness
- ⊗ Mood swings
- ⊗ Skin changes.

What about serious side effects?

Serious problems are rare, but if you have any of the changes listed below, **call The Annex or an Emergency Room immediately.**

- A:** abdominal pain (severe)
- C:** chest pain (severe), cough, shortness of breath
- H:** headache (unusual and severe), dizziness, weakness or numbness
- E:** eye problems (vision loss or blurring)
- S:** severe leg pain

Don't Smoke. Smoking increases your chances of serious side effects.



How can I get birth control pills?

A woman needs an examination that involves getting your medical history, a pelvic exam and pap smear and sometimes a pregnancy test.

Things to remember

- ⊗ Don't stop taking the pill unless instructed to by a doctor
- ⊗ You don't need to take a break from taking the pill.
- ⊗ Remember that the pill offers NO protections for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- ⊗ Let your doctor know you are taking the pill. Some medications interact with birth control pills.
- ⊗ Remember: birth control pills are a medication, so don't take someone else's pills.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Will the pill make me fat?

There is no research that supports that there is weight gain on the pill. Often women start the pill around the time they would naturally gain weight anyway. Let your clinic know if you are having any unwanted side effects. Often we can figure out what is going wrong and pick a better pill for you.

Will the pill give me zits?

Generally, no! Most pills help get rid of acne. It may worsen acne for the first month or so.

What if I don't like the side effects of the pill I'm taking?

There are many different kinds of birth control pills, which allow us to change the brand of pill to get rid of most unwanted side effects. Again, for the first three months you may have temporary side effects. Stick with it and many of them may go away. Call us if you have questions.

Can I get pregnant after being on the pill?

Yes. Sometimes it can take a little longer to get pregnant. However, discontinuing the pill can also make you very fertile for a while.

Am I at risk for pregnancy during my week of reminder pills?

NO! If you take your 3 weeks of hormonal pills correctly, your body will not ovulate during your week of reminder pills. But if you miss pills during your hormonal pills, you may ovulate.

What if I forget a pill?

You may spot (bleed between periods) which is not harmful and will go away.

If you forget one pill, take it as soon as you remember and take your next pill at the regular time, this may mean that you are taking two pills at once. Use a backup method of birth control for one week if you missed a pill by more than 6 hours.

If you forget two pills in a row, take two pills for the next two days. You are not protected against pregnancy for the rest of your pill pack a you need to use a back up method until you start a new pill pack.

If you forget more than two pills in a row, start a new pack and use a backup method for the first seven days.

How do I take the pill?

Each pill pack has 3 weeks of hormone pills and one week of “reminder” pills. You have to take one pill at the **same time every day**. Set your watch or cell phone alarm as a reminder.

There are 4 ways to start your first pack of pills or restart your pills:

Any day you want: Start the first pill on any day you choose. The benefit is that you won't have to wait until your period starts. The negative is that for 7 days you can't have sex or must use a backup method of birth control. You might spot (bleed between periods) in the first month of pill. This should go away after a few cycles.

Any Sunday you want: Start the first pill on any Sunday you choose. The benefits and negatives are the same as above, and you probably won't get your period on the weekend.

The first Sunday after your period: Wait until your period starts, then take the first pill on the following Sunday. If your period starts on Sunday, start that day. The benefit of this is that you are less likely to have spotting the first month of pills, and starting on Sunday means that you probably won't have your period on the weekend. The negative is that for the first 7 days you can't have sex or you must use a backup method.

The first day of your period: Take your first pill on the day that your period starts. The benefit is that the pill is effective immediately and you don't need to use a backup method of birth control. You are also less likely to have spotting during the first few months of pills. The negative is that you have to wait for your period to start, and this could be a long time, especially if your periods are irregular, and you may get your period on weekends.

For any of the methods:

You should get your period while taking your “reminder” pills. When you take your last pill in the pack, it is time to start a new pack.

You are still covered for pregnancy prevention during the reminder pills.

Taking the pill will not hurt a potential pregnancy, but you should come in for a pregnancy test if you don't get a period at the end of your first pack of pills.

Extended Use of Birth Control Pills

Extended use is a way of using birth control pills so that you have a period every 3 months instead of every month, it does not reduce the effectiveness of the pill and it is not harmful. We recommend that you talk to an Annex nurse or practitioner before starting extended use because some brands of pills are not good for extended use and we want to answer any questions you may have.

How to: Take your pills as directed but after the 3rd week of active pills, DON'T take the sugar pills, instead, start another pack of pills and take the active (hormone) pills. Do this for 3 packs of pills (63 days), then take the sugar pills for one week, at that time you will get your period.

If you get your period (not just spotting) anytime during the 63 days of active pills, stop using the active pills and use sugar pills for 7 days. Then begin a new 3-month cycle of active pills.

The potential disadvantages are that extended use requires the purchase of more packs of pill per year (17 instead of 13). There may be spotting or cramping during the 63 hormone days. Your period may be heavier and crampier than usual. You may get confused if you don't keep track of which pills you are supposed to be taking.

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