



the Birth Control Pill



Community and Health
Services Department

What is the birth control pill?

The birth control pill is taken to prevent pregnancy. Most birth control pills contain estrogen and progestin, which are hormones normally found in a woman's body.

How does the birth control pill work?

- it stops your ovaries from releasing an egg each month. This is known as ovulation
- it makes the mucus in the cervix thicker thus making it harder for the sperm to travel into the uterus
- the lining of the uterus becomes thinner, making it harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus

How effective is the birth control pill?

When taken correctly the birth control pill is 99 percent effective. In other words, of every 100 women who use the pill for one year according to instructions, approximately one will get pregnant.

How do you use the birth control pill?

Take one pill a day for 28 days and start a new package the very next day. It is important to take the birth control pill at the same time every day. Start the pill on the first day of your period or on the Sunday after starting your period.

Birth control pills given out at York Region's Sexual Health clinics come in packs of 28, seven of which are reminder, non-hormonal pills.

- read the instructions that come with the birth control pills and check the expiry date on the package before you use them
- if you get the 28-day pack, you should take one pill each day. For 21 days, you will be taking pills that have hormones. For seven days, you will be taking pills that do not have hormones. Usually your period starts during one of the seven days of non-hormonal pills

Your chances of getting pregnant are lower if you take the birth control pills at the same time every day.

The birth control pill may not work as effectively:

- during the 1st month of starting the pill
- if you are late taking your pill
- if you forget a pill
- if you are on antibiotics, antacids or seizure medication. Check with the pharmacist if taking other medications
- if you are vomiting or have diarrhea

Use an additional method of birth control, such as condoms, during these times and for one week after.

If you forget to take your pill, read your instruction booklet or call York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653** for instructions.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking the birth control pill?

Advantages

- your risk of getting pregnant is low
- your period will be regular and may be lighter
- your menstrual cramps may also be decreased
- there is a reduced risk of cancer of the uterus and ovaries in women who take the pill for at least eight years
- there is a reduced risk of cysts of the ovaries and benign breast disease
- you don't have to interrupt sex to take it

Disadvantages

- you must remember to take it at the same time each day
- you are not protected against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- some women experience some side effects such as nausea, feeling bloated, headaches, breast tenderness and spotting between periods. If these last longer than three months, contact the clinic. Switching to a different birth control pill could stop these side effects

A very small number of women may experience serious problems such as a blood clot. You have an increased risk of these problems if you are a smoker or have high blood pressure, or are over 40 years of age.

Early Warning Signs

- abdominal pain (severe)
- chest pain (severe), shortness of breath
- headaches (severe), dizziness, weakness, numbness
- eye problems (vision loss or blurring), speech problems
- severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

If you experience any of the above call a doctor **immediately** or go to the nearest **hospital emergency department** and tell them you are using the birth control pill.

The birth control pill does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Use condoms every time you have sex.

