

The Birth Control Pill

What is the birth control pill?

The birth control pill is a small tablet that is taken daily to prevent pregnancy. It contains two types of hormones, estrogen and progestin. In 28-day pill packs, there are active pills and placebo pills. Active pills are used for the first 21 days and placebo pills are used for the last seven days.

How it works

The birth control pill works in three ways:

- It stops your ovaries from releasing an egg each month.
- It makes the mucus in the cervix thicker thus making it harder for the sperm to travel into the cervix (the opening to the uterus).
- The lining of the uterus becomes thinner, making it harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus.

Effectiveness

The birth control pill is 99 per cent effective with perfect use. In other words, of 100 women who use the birth control pill, approximately one woman will get pregnant in one year. The birth control pill may not work as effectively during the first seven days of starting it. The birth control pill may also not work as effectively if you vomit or have diarrhea, or if you are taking certain medications such as antibiotics or seizure medication. Always check with the pharmacist or your health care provider if you are taking other medications. You should use an additional method of birth control such as condoms during these times and for one week after you finish your medication.

Advantages

- Decreased menstrual cramps
- Lighter, shorter, more regular periods
- Improvement in acne
- Reduced risks of cysts of ovaries and benign breast disease
- Decreased risk of uterine and ovarian cancers

Disadvantages

- Headaches (if severe or more frequent than usual, call your doctor or clinic)
- Breakthrough bleeding or spotting between periods
- Breast tenderness
- Nausea (try taking your pills with food and eat regular meals)

If you experience any of these side effects, they will usually resolve within four to six months. If they continue longer, ask your doctor about trying a different birth control pill.

Instructions for Use

Starting your first pill pack

When to start taking your pills—you have three options: quick start, first-day start, Sunday start.



1-800-361-5653
TTY: 1-866-252-9933

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Quick start

Take your first birth control pill during your clinic appointment and use a back-up method of birth control for the first seven days of pills (e.g. condom).

First-day start

Take your birth control pill on the day you begin your period.

Sunday start

Take your first birth control pill on the first Sunday **after your period begins**. You may still be bleeding when you start the pill. If your period starts on a Sunday, take your first pill that day. Use a back-up method of birth control for the first seven days of pills (e.g. condom)

Once you've started the birth control pill

- Take one pill every day for 28 days.
- Always take your pill at the same time every day.
- When you have finished one package, start a new package the very next day. There are **NO** pill-free days.
- Your period will usually start during the last seven days of the package.
- The last seven pills in the package do not contain hormones.

If you miss one or more birth control pills

At any time during your 28-day cycle, if you miss one pill by less than 24 hours take it as soon as you remember and continue your pill pack.

During week one

If you miss one pill by more than 24 hours or miss more than one pill:

- Take one active pill ASAP and continue taking one pill daily until the end of the pack.
- Abstain from intercourse or use back-up contraception for the next seven days (e.g., condom).
- If you have had unprotected intercourse within the last five days, consider using emergency contraception. (Plan B is an emergency contraceptive available without a prescription. If you are at risk of unplanned pregnancy it is recommended that Plan B be taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex).

During week two or three

If you miss less than three pills:

- Take one active pill ASAP. Continue taking the rest of the active pills in the pack. Discard the Placebo pills and start a new pack.
- You may experience some spotting/bleeding but not get your period this cycle.

If you miss three or more pills:

- Take one active pill ASAP. Continue taking the rest of the active pills in the pack. Discard the Placebo pills and start a new pack.
- Abstain from intercourse or use back-up contraception for the next seven days (e.g., condom).

For more information on what to do if you miss a pill, a *Stay on Schedule* app is available at www.sexualityandu.ca

Possible 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, have high blood pressure, or are over 40 years of age. Early warning signs include:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe chest pain or shortness of breath
- Severe headaches, 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 911 or go to nearest emergency department and tell them you are taking the birth control pill.**

The birth control pill may make you more sensitive to the ultraviolet radiation from the sun and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and avoid the use of tanning beds.

The birth control pill does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections. Always use a condom from beginning to end of all sexual contact to reduce your risk.



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