



Patient & Family Guide
2019

Birth Control Pills

Aussi disponible en français :
La pilule contraceptive (FF85-2027)



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Birth Control Pills

How do birth control pills (“the pill”) work?

- Birth control pills usually have 2 sex hormones: estrogen and progestin. Birth control pills prevent you from ovulating (releasing an egg from your ovary each month). You cannot get pregnant if you do not ovulate because there is no egg to be fertilized.
- Birth control pills also thicken the mucus made by your cervix (opening of the uterus), making it harder for sperm to move through the mucus and into the uterus.
- The hormones in birth control pills can also change the lining of the uterus, making it harder for an egg to attach to the wall of the uterus.

How well do birth control pills work?

The pill is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy when taken properly.

When do birth control pills start working?

Birth control pills start working after you have taken the first package of pills over the course of one month.

Pros of birth control pills:

- They may help to make your period more regular.
- They may make cramps during your period less painful.
- Your period flow may be lighter.
- They lower the risk of getting cancer of the ovary or endometrium (lining of the uterus).
- They help to keep your bones healthy.
- They may help to decrease acne (pimples).
- They are easy to take.
- They may be safely taken by women until menopause if they are non-smokers.

Cons of birth control pills:

- You have to remember to take a pill at the same time every day.
- You have to see a primary health care provider for a prescription.
- Some people may have side effects and may not be able to take birth control pills.
- You may have a higher risk of breast cancer if you take them for more than 5 years.

How do I take birth control pills?

Take the pill within 4 hours of the same time every day. Choose a time that combines taking your pill along with doing something else (e.g., going to bed at night, eating breakfast in the morning, etc.).

Pills come in either a 21-day pack or a 28-day pack.

21-day pack:

- Take the first pill on the Sunday after your procedure.
- Take one pill at the same time each day for 21 days, until all the pills are gone.
- It is common to have some spotting or bleeding during your first pack of pills.
- When you have taken all 21 pills, wait 7 days before starting a new pack.
- Start the new pack on the following Sunday.
- You will probably have your period during the week when you are not taking any birth control pills. You may not have your period after the first pack, but keep taking the birth control pills on schedule. If you do not have your period after the second pack, see your primary health care provider for advice.

28-day pack:

- Take the first pill on the Sunday after your procedure.
- Take one pill at the same time each day for 28 days, until all the pills are gone.
- Start a new pack of birth control pills the next day.
- You will probably have your period during the last 7 pills.
- It is common to have some spotting or bleeding during your first pack of pills.
- The last 7 pills (reminder or “sugar” pills) do not have any hormones. Taking them helps you to keep up your daily routine.

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

What can change how well birth control pills work?

Medications such as:

- › antibiotics (drugs for infections)
- › sedatives (drugs that help you sleep or relax)
- › oral (by mouth) anti-fungals (drugs to treat a yeast infection)
- › antacids (drugs for heartburn)
- › anticonvulsants (drugs for epilepsy)
- Always check with your primary health care provider or pharmacist before taking other medications while on birth control pills. If you are taking a medication that may change how your birth control pills work, consider using condoms as well as your pills, or wait to have sex until after you start your next pack.
- Vomiting (throwing up) or having diarrhea even once can make birth control pills less effective, because the pill may not be absorbed (taken in) properly.

If any of the above things happen, keep taking your birth control pills. You should also use a condom as back-up or wait to have sex until after you start the next pack of pills.

What if I forget to take a birth control pill?

You can get pregnant if you forget to take one pill or even if you are 4 hours late taking a pill. Your hormone levels may be lowered and you may release an egg.

If you miss 1 pill:

- Take the missed pill as soon as you remember.
- Take your next pill at the regular time.
- To be safe, use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide) for the rest of the pack, or wait to have sex until after you start the next pack.

If you miss 2 or more pills:

- Do not take the pills for the missed days.
- Continue taking the rest of the pills in the pack on schedule.
- Use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide) for the rest of the pack, or wait to have sex until after you start the next pack.

If you have missed 1 or more pills and do not get your period when you finish the pack, see your primary health care provider.

Note: If you are taking a 28–day pack and you forget any of the 7 reminder pills, you do not need to use a back-up method of birth control.

What are the possible side effects of birth control pills?

Early side effects may be:

- › headaches
- › nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- › vomiting
- › breast tenderness
- › depression
- › rash and/or acne
- › vaginal infections
- › spotting or breakthrough bleeding (like a period) – this does not mean that your birth control pills are not working

These side effects usually go away after the first 3 months. If you have any side effects, see your primary health care provider so they can adjust your dose. **Check with your primary health care provider before you stop taking your birth control pills.**

Stop taking the pill and see your primary health care provider right away if you have more serious side effects, such as:

- › migraine headaches
- › leg cramps
- › chest pain
- › high blood pressure
- › blood clot in the leg or lung

Smoking and birth control pills

- Birth control pills are not prescribed for women who smoke and are over 35 because the risk of stroke and heart attack is too high.
- Women who smoke are encouraged to stop. Smoking increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and blood clots.

Will birth control pills protect me from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

- Birth control pills will **not** protect you from sexually transmitted infections such as herpes, chlamydia, genital warts, gonorrhea, or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex to protect yourself from STIs.

We recommend that you see your primary health care provider once a year for a breast exam, pelvic exam, and Pap smear.

