

Facts About

Birth Control Pills (“The Pill”- Combined and Progestin-only pills)

What are birth control pills?

Birth control pills, also known as oral contraceptives or just “the pill” is a birth control medicine that you take by mouth. You take it once a day, at the same time every day. There are two types of pills – combined and progestin-only.

How do the pills work?

Birth control pills have hormones just like the ones your body makes. You take the pill once a day, at the same time every day to prevent pregnancy.

Combined pills – contain two hormones, estrogen and progestin, like your body makes. These hormones stop your ovaries from releasing eggs and cause the cervical mucus to thicken, which prevents sperm from reaching an egg.

Progestin-only pills – are a good choice if you cannot take estrogen. These pills contain only one hormone, progestin. This hormone causes the lining of the uterus (womb) to thin and the cervical mucus to thicken, which prevents sperm from meeting with and fertilizing an egg. This hormone delays or stop ovaries from releasing eggs most of the time.

How well do the pills work?

Birth control pills work about 99% of the time if you take them the right way and at the same time every day. They do not work well (91% - 94% typical use) if you miss pills or you are late taking them. You should use a back-up method when you have a stomach “bug” with vomiting or diarrhea, or if you have to take an antibiotic.

About Combined birth control pills

Is there anyone who should not use Combined birth control pills?

You should not use birth control pills if:

- You are pregnant or think you might be.
- You have high blood pressure.

- You have ever had a heart attack, stroke or blood clots.
- You have ever had breast cancer.
- You have unexplained vaginal bleeding.
- You have migraines with visual problems and/or sensitivity to light, sound or smell.
- You have diabetes with kidney, eye, nerve or blood vessel damage.
- You have liver disease, liver tumors, or your eyes look yellow

Smoking increases your risk of serious side effects. Women who use birth control methods with hormones should not smoke. This includes electronic cigarettes.

What are the possible side effects of Combined birth control pills?

Serious problems are rare. The most common side effects of the combined birth control pill includes breast tenderness, nausea, skin changes/acne, mood swings, fatigue, weight changes, headache, and breakthrough bleeding. There is a very slight risk of blood clots, heart attacks, and strokes.

What are the side effects of Progestin-only birth control pills?

The most common side effects of the Progestin-only birth control pill include irregular menstrual periods, headache, breast tenderness and nausea.

About Progestin-only birth control pills

Is there anyone who should not use Progestin-only birth control pills?

You should not use the progestin-only birth control pills if:

- You have or ever had breast cancer
- You are pregnant
- You have liver disease (hepatitis), liver tumors, or your eyes look yellow
- You have a history of stroke, vascular disease, or poorly controlled high blood pressure

How will I know if I have a problem?

If you have any of the symptoms below, call your doctor or clinic right away, as these could be symptoms of a serious health problem:

- A – Abdominal pain (severe, sudden onset)
- C – Chest Pain, shortness of breath, coughing up blood
- H – Headache (severe, will not go away), numbness, or weakness in arms or legs
- E – Eye problems: sudden vision changes, blurring, flashing lights
- S – Severe leg pain in calf or thigh

Where can I get birth control pills?

You need a prescription. You can get birth control pills at your local drug store or at the health department.

How do I take birth control pills?

Swallow one pill each day. This must be done at about the same time each day no matter what. Try taking your pill at the same time you always do something else in your daily routine – like brushing your teeth in the morning or going to bed at night. If you need a reminder, there are apps available for your electronic devices that send a text message or email reminders about when to take your pill. There are three ways to begin taking the combined birth control pills:

1. Start taking the pills on the first day of your next period.
2. “Quick Start” – You will start taking the pills the day you receive them but you must use a backup method such as condoms for 7 days.
3. Sunday start – Begin taking the pills on the next Sunday and use condoms for the next 7 days as a backup. Sunday start can result in no periods on the weekend.

21-day pills - Take one pill at the same time each day for 21 days. Wait 7 days before starting a new pack. During the week you are not taking the pill, you will have your period.

28-day pills - Take one pill at the same time each day for 28 days.

- Depending on the brand of **Combined Pills**, the first 21 pills or the first 24 pills contain estrogen and progestin. The remaining pills may be estrogen-only pills; pills that contain a dietary supplement, such as iron, but no hormones; or inactive pills (containing no hormones or supplements). During the days you are taking the hormone-free pills, you will have your period.

- **Progestin-only pills** come only in packages of 28-day “active” pills. You can start taking the progestin-only birth control pills at any time as long as you are not pregnant. All pills contain hormones.
 - If you start taking the progestin-only birth control pills the first 5 days of your period, you do not need a back-up method of birth control.
 - If you start taking the progestin-only birth control pills 5 days or more after your period, you will need to use a back-up method (such as condoms) or do not have sex.
 - If you are late taking a progestin-only pill by more than three hours, you will need to use another type of birth control (such as a condom) to prevent pregnancy, but continue to take the progestin-only pill.

90-day pills - Take one pill at the same time each day for 84 days. Depending on the brand, the last seven pills either contain no hormones or contain estrogen only. With both brands, you will have your period on the last 7 days every 3 months.

365-day pills - Take one pill at the same time each day for a year. In time, your bleeding may become lighter and may even stop.

If you forget to take a pill, take it as soon as you remember and then use condoms as a back up until your next period. If you miss more than two pills call your doctor or clinic or read the package insert for guidance.

What if I stopped using the pills and had unprotected sex?

Take Emergency Contraception right away. Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy up to 5 days after sex, and it works better the sooner you take it. You can get ECPs at the drug store without a prescription or at your county health department’s family planning clinic or doctor’s office.

REMEMBER:

- Birth control pills do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV. To protect yourself, use a latex or vinyl condom every time you have oral, vaginal or anal sex.
- Follow the directions your doctor, nurse, or clinic gave you. Take the pill even on days when you do not have sex.
- Certain antibiotics, St. Johns Wort, and some medications used to treat HIV, tuberculosis, and seizures may make birth control pills less effective.