



BIRTH CONTROL WITH THE PILL

You are making a good choice in protecting yourself against an unplanned pregnancy. Remember, however, that no birth control method is 100% effective except abstinence (that is, not having sexual relations). The pill also does not protect you against getting a sexually transmitted disease – you should **ALWAYS** use condoms, and limit your number of sexual partners to increase your protection.

Try to associate taking your pill with something else that you do at about the same time every day, like going to bed, eating a meal, or brushing your teeth. A regular routine may make it easier to remember your pills. Pills work best if you take one about the same time every day in order to keep a steady level of hormones in your system.

Check your pack of birth control pills each morning to make sure you took your pill the day before.

You may start taking your pills according to one of several different schedules. The possible schedules are:

- Starting on the first day of menstrual bleeding
- Starting on the first Sunday after your period begins

Check with your clinician to see how long you should use a backup method. Take one pill a day until you finish the pack.

For the Sunday start schedule:

If menstrual flow starts on		Tablet-taking begins on
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday	→	the following Sunday
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		<i>that</i> Sunday

If you forget to take your birth control pill or you start your pack late, follow the instructions below:

- **If you miss one pill**, take that tablet as soon as you remember it. Take your next tablet at the regular time. You probably will not get pregnant but, just to be sure, you may want to use a backup method for 7 days after the missed pill.
- **If you miss two pills in a row**, then take two tablets as soon as you remember and take two tablets the next day. Then return to your regular schedule, but use a backup method of birth control 7 days after two missed tablets.
- **If you miss three pills in a row**, you will probably begin your period. Whether or not you are menstruating, throw away the rest of your pack and begin your next pack as you did when you first started the method. For example, if you are a “Sunday starter” begin your next pack on Sunday. If you started on any other day, you may simply start your next pack immediately. **Use a backup method of birth control until you have been back on pills for 7 days.**
- **If you miss two periods in a row**, come to the clinic for a pregnancy test immediately, even if you took your pills every day. Bring a sample of your first-morning urine in a clean container.
- **If you do become pregnant** while taking birth control pills, you must decide whether you want to have a child at this time or, alternatively, whether abortion is an option for you. The risk of having a baby with birth defects does not seem to be increased in pill users who become pregnant. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recently concluded that pills do not increase the risk for birth defects: “There is no evidence that there is an increased risk of fetal anomalies for previous pill users, from inadvertent exposure early in pregnancy, or in pregnancies occurring immediately after discontinuation of oral contraceptives”.

Many women experience nausea the first month they take pills. This tends to go away in the next cycle or so. If nausea continues, switching to the lowest estrogen pill may be very helpful. See your health-care provider.

Women taking pills note that periods tend to be short and scanty, and you may see no fresh blood at all. A drop of blood or a brown smudge on your tampon or on your underwear is considered a period when you are on the pill.

Serious side effects of the pill occur infrequently, especially if you are in good health and do not smoke. However, you should know the following have been associated with or made worse by the pill:

- Risk of developing blood clots, which may occur in the legs, lungs and, rarely, the blood vessels of the eyes.
- Risk of heart attacks and strokes, which is greatly increased with smoking and pill use.
- Risk for gallbladder disease.
- Risk for liver tumors, which are benign but potentially dangerous.
- There is no evidence of cervical cancer linked to pill use. There is very little evidence, and it is contradictory, regarding breast cancer with no definite evidence of an increased risk of breast cancer.

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CAUTION:

Early Pill Warning Signs

- A** Abdominal pain (severe)
- C** Chest pain (severe), cough, shortness of breath
- H** Headaches (severe), dizziness, weakness, or numbness
- E** Eye problems (vision loss or blurring), speech problems
- S** Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

See your clinician if you have any of these problems, or if you develop depression, yellow jaundice, or a breast lump.

Cigarette smoking increases the risk of serious cardiovascular side effects from oral contraceptive use. This risk increases with age and heavy smoking (15 or more cigarettes a day) and is quite marked in women over 35 years of age. Women who use oral contraceptives are strongly advised not to smoke.