

SIDE EFFECTS with hormonal contraception are common and usually resolve within the first few packs. They include:

Headaches

Dizziness

Breast tenderness

Nausea and/or vomiting

Breakthrough bleeding

Mood swings

Lighter periods

Weight gain

WARNING SIGNS

Contact your doctor should you experience any of the following warning signs:

A: persistent and worsening abdominal pain

C: chest pain or shortness of breath

H: headaches (new onset or significant worsening of headaches)

E: eye problems (blurred vision or loss of vision)

S: severe and persistent leg pain

SAFETY INFORMATION

Birth control pills **DO NOT** protect against HIV or sexually transmitted diseases.

Cigarette smoking increases the risk of cardiovascular side effects, especially if you are over 35. Women on birth control pills should not smoke.

Women who have or have had blood clots, heart attack, stroke, certain types of cancer, or may be pregnant should not take birth control pills.

REFERENCES

<http://www.istockphoto.com/stock-photo-101887-the-pill.php>

Hatcher, R.A., Trussell, J., Nelson, A.L., Gates, W., Stewart, F.H., & Kowal, D. *Contraceptive Technology*. New York: Ardent Media, Inc

Zieman, M., Hatcher, R.A., Cwiak, C., Darney, P.D., Creinin, M.D., & Stosur, H.R. (2010). *2010-2012 Managing Contraception For Your Pocket*. Tiger: The Bridging the Gap Foundation

WOMEN'S HEALTH SPECIALISTS
6301 EXECUTIVE BOULEVARD
ROCKVILLE, MD 20852
301-770-4967
WWW.ROCKVILLEGYN.COM

BIRTH CONTROL PILLS



† HOW DO THEY WORK ‡

Birth control pills (oral contraceptives) are medications that contain hormones to prevent pregnancy. Some contain two hormones, estrogen and progesterone, otherwise known as combination pills. Some are progesterone only pills. The hormones work primarily by preventing ovulation. (Egg releasing from ovary.) Pregnancy cannot occur if there is no egg to join with sperm. The pill also prevents pregnancy by thickening the cervical mucous to block sperm from entering the upper reproductive tract. They decrease the motility of the fallopian tubes as well as create a thin endometrial lining which prevents implantation of a fertilized egg.

THE IN'S AND OUT'S OF TAKING BIRTH CONTROL PILLS

GETTING STARTED

QUICK START: Take your first pill the day that your pills are prescribed

FIRST-DAY START: Take your first pill on the first day of your next period

SUNDAY START: Take your first pill on the first Sunday, after you start your period.

HOW DO I TAKE BIRTH CONTROL PILLS?

How you take your pills depends on what kind of pill you are taking. Most combination pills (COC) come in 28-day or 21-day packs. Both types have 21 or 24 "active" pills that contain hormones. The last 4 or 7 pills in 28-day packs are "reminder" pills or placebo days. They do not contain hormones. In 21-day packs, one pill is taken every day for three weeks in a row. No pills are taken for the next week, and then a new pack of pills is started. You will get your period during the fourth week. Some COC's contain a few months' worth of active pills. These are known as "extended packs". They are specially packaged to reduce the number of periods a woman has each year. Women can also take the active pills in 28-day or 21-day packs continuously to reduce how often they have periods.

Progestin-only pills (POP) come only in 28-day packs. All progestin-only pills are active. With progestin-only pills, you may get your period the fourth week, have no periods, or have bleeding on and off throughout the month.

The hormones in birth control pills prevent pregnancy throughout the entire month, even during the fourth week.

Taking the pill around the same time each day makes it easier to remember and decreases breakthrough bleeding. Pick a time of day that is easy for you to remember. You might find it helpful to take it when you do something else you do every day, like brushing your teeth or eating dinner. Many women set an alarm on their cell phones or watch to remind them to take their pills.

MISSED PILLS

What you need to do if you miss pills depends on the kind of pill that you are taking, how many pills you missed, and where in the pack you are. For COC's:

Missed 1 pill:

- * Take the last pill you missed as soon as possible
- * Take the rest of the pack as usual
- * No additional contraception needed

Missed more than 1 pill:

- * Take the last pill you missed as soon as possible
- * Take the rest of the pack as usual
- * Use an extra method of contraception for the next 7 days
- * If you had unprotected sex in the previous few days, you may need emergency contraception. Seek advice

Missed more than 2 pills: As above plus

- * If there are 7 or more pills left in the pack after missed pills, finish the pack and have the usual 7 day break or take the placebo pills
- * If are less than 7 pills left in the pack after missed pills, finish the pack and begin the new one the next day. This

means skipping the break and not taking the placebo pills

For POP's:

- * If you missed taking your pill by more than 3 hours, take it as soon as you remember, even if it means taking 2 pills in one day
- * Use an extra method of contraception for the next 2 days
- * Take the rest of the pack as usual

CONTINUOUS BIRTH CONTROL PILLS

28-day and 21-day combination pills may be taken continuously to avoid menstruation.

- * Take an "active pill" at the same time every day
- * When all of the "active pills" are taken, start a new pack the next day. **DO NOT TAKE A BREAK.**

Spotting may occur with continuous birth control use. If this occurs, stop taking "active pills" for 3 days and then resume pills. You must always take at least 3 weeks of "active pills" before taking a 3 day break. Taking a 3 day break will allow the lining of the uterus to shed, so bleeding will occur. Restart your pills after the 3 day break even if you are still bleeding.