

Birth Control Pill Instructions

When to start?

Begin your first pack of pills on the first day of your period for maximum effectiveness. If that is not possible, begin before the 5th day. Start by taking the pill in the upper left corner (top row) of your pack. Keep taking the pills and begin your next pack after finishing all 28 pills. If you don't take the "placebo" pills (last row), then begin your next pack one week after taking the last active pill. Your pill pack contains pills in 2 or more colors. Estrogen and progestin are in at least 21 of the 28 pills ("active" pills).

When am I protected from pregnancy?

If you begin your pills on the 1st day of your period, you are protected immediately.

If you begin your pills in the first 5 days of your period, you are protected after 7 days of continuous use.

If you begin your pills later than the 5th day of your period, you will not be protected that month.

What if I don't have regular periods and it may not start for a couple of months?

You can start your pill on any day, but use a back-up method for the first 30 days.

What time of day should I take my pills?

The time of day is not important as taking them at the same time every day. It is especially important to maintain a consistent schedule (<4hr variation) if you take low estrogen pills (20mcg or less).

If I have spotting, should I stop taking the pill?

No, spotting is a common side effect, especially the first 1-3 months of taking the pill. Spotting is common when you take them continuously, meaning, you don't take the placebo pills (different colored pills at the end of the monthly pack). Some brands are designed to be taken continuously for 84-87 days to decrease the number of periods that occur in a year.

Will I gain weight or will my breasts enlarge?

This is a common concern. Research blames about 5 pounds of weight gain on the hormonal changes that cause fluid retention. The estrogen in birth control pills causes breast enlargement in many women. Breast tenderness may occur for a couple of months. If the pill is discontinued, these changes are reversed.

What are the most common side effects?

At the beginning, many women have breast tenderness, nausea and spotting. These symptoms usually subside within a month or two. Women who wear contact lenses may notice their eyes being dry. This can interfere with the ability to wear contacts. Periods often become lighter while taking the pill.

Are there more serious risks to taking the pill?

Yes, medications that contain estrogen increase your risk of high blood pressure and for blood clots to form in the lower legs which can cause a stroke, pulmonary embolus or heart attack. The pill increases cholesterol levels and can increase the risk of gallbladder or liver disease. All risks increase with age.

Should anyone NOT take the pill?

Yes, women who have had breast or uterine cancer, blood clots or strokes, have heart valve disorders, liver disease, a condition that increases the risk of blood clots, or are over the age of 35 and smoke cigarettes should not take it. The pill may cause or worsen migraine headaches and should not be taken

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in those cases. The pill should not be taken if you are breast-feeding or pregnant, or within 4 weeks of pregnancy.

What should I do if I forget to take a pill? Or more than one?

If you forget **one pill**, take it as soon as you remember. Take the next one at its usual time. If you take two pills together, you should expect nausea-this is what morning sickness is like. If you forget to take **two pills** in a row and you are **in week 1 or 2** of your pill pack, take two pills that (same) day and two pills the next day. If you are in **week 3** then throw out that pack and begin a new pack that day. If you have forgotten **more than 2 pills**, throw out that pack and begin a new pack that day.

You may experience a skipped period and/or spotting through the next pack. Continue taking your pills. Any time an active pill is forgotten, a back-up method should be used until the next 7 pills have been taken at the routine time. If you forget a placebo pill, throw away any missed pills and keep taking a pill a day until you finish your pack. Placebo pills don't contain hormones- they are "inert"-but make sure you don't go more than 7 days before taking an active pill. You won't need a back up method if you miss a placebo pill.

Is the pill foolproof?

Absolutely not. It is 99% effective if taken perfectly-meaning every day at the same hour of the day. Still some women become pregnant. With average use, the effectiveness is 92%.

Antibiotics, especially amoxicillin, ampicillin, penicillin, minocycline, doxycycline, tetracycline, clarithromycin, griseofulvin, predisone, theophylline, and rifampin can decrease their effectiveness.

In addition, women who take dilantin, phenobarbital, barbiturates, HIV medications, Tylenol, vitamin C and St. John's Wort should be very cautious, and perhaps use a back-up method, as these medications can decrease the effectiveness of the pill.

Can the pill make my acne better?

It's quite possible. Acne involves an interaction between your hormones and the bacteria on your skin. If your hormones are better regulated with the pill then your acne may improve. However, the progestin may not agree with your system and cause acne or worsen it. One particular brand has FDA approval to advertise that its pill helps acne because that company included that factor in the research before the pill was available to the public.

How does it work?

These hormones suppress ovulation and cause endometrial (the lining of the uterus) and cervical mucus changes. The levels of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH) are decreased. FSH stimulates the growth and maturation of ovarian follicles and LH triggers ovulation. Therefore, no eggs are produced unless the hormone levels drop by forgetting a pill, stopping them entirely or taking medications that increase the speed at which the pill is metabolized.

Remember the pill does not prevent sexually transmitted infections. If you develop any unexpected symptoms, contact your provider, or go to the emergency room if severe symptoms occur. 8/11LB