

Oral Contraceptives, The Pill

The Pill is a combined hormonal birth control method. The Pill contains the hormones estrogen and progestin, and releases these hormones into the body. These combined hormones prevent pregnancy primarily by suppressing ovulation, the release of an egg from an ovary. In addition, the Pill thickens the mucus in the cervix, making it difficult for sperm to enter the uterus. The Pill thins the lining of the uterus, making it less likely that a fertilized egg can attach.

Possible benefits of oral contraceptives

- close to 99% effective in preventing pregnancy, if taken properly
- decreased menstrual cramps
- decreased menstrual bleeding
- decreased pain at the time of ovulation
- more regular menstrual bleeding
- less risk of pelvic inflammatory disease
- less risk of developing ovarian and/or endometrial cancer
- less risk of developing benign breast tumors and/or ovarian cysts
- may improve acne

Possible risks of oral contraceptives

- blood clots of the legs or lungs
- strokes or heart attacks
- no protection against sexually transmitted diseases, STD's
- may elevate blood pressure
- gallstones

Possible side effects of oral contraceptives

- breast tenderness
- spotting between periods
- less menstrual bleeding
- weight gain or weight loss; dependent on dietary intake
- depression
- headache
- nausea
- darkening of skin on the face
- worsening of acne

The majority of serious complications in birth control pill users occur in women over 35 who smoke.

Danger Signs

- A - Abdomen pain, severe.
- C - Chest pain, severe; cough, shortness of breath.
- H - Headaches, severe; dizziness, weakness, numbness.
- E - Eye problems; vision loss or blurring, speech problems.
- S - Severe leg pain; calf and thigh.

Call our office immediately if you experience any of the danger signs.

Oral Contraceptives Instructions

It is imperative that you understand how to take your birth control pills, and what to do if you miss a pill. Understanding and following the directives on how to take your birth control pill contributes to having the highest level of effectiveness and protection.

Determine a back up method of birth control

Pill users must have a back up method of birth control. Determine a backup method of birth control such as abstinence, condoms, diaphragm, foam, or spermicidal suppositories or tablets.

Taking the pill

- **Take your first pill** on the first day of your next menstrual cycle.
- Take your birth control pill at approximately the same time every day. For maximum effect from the Pill, choose a consistent time to take your pill each day.
- Your period should begin sometime during the last week of your birth control pill cycle.

Missed pill

- **If you miss 1 pill**, take the missed pill as soon as you remember. If you miss 1 pill and it is the next day, take the pill as soon as you remember. In addition, take your scheduled pill at the regular time.
- **If you miss 2 pills in a row**, take two pills as soon as you remember. The next day, take two pills; you can take these two pills at your scheduled time, or take 1 pill in the morning and 1 pill the evening. You must abstain from sex or use your back up method of birth control until you finish the entire birth control packet.
- **If you miss 3 or more pills**, you are not protected. You can become pregnant. You must abstain from sex or use your back up method of birth control.

Stopping the pill

- You can stop the Pill at the completion of your birth control packet; finish all the pills in the cycle. You must abstain from sex or use another method of birth control if you want to avoid pregnancy.
- If your periods were irregular, heavy, or very painful before taking birth control pills, your periods may return to this pattern.

Missed menstrual periods and irregular bleeding

- If you miss a menstrual period, but have taken your birth control pills as instructed, it is very unlikely that you are pregnant, though you may be. Missing periods is a common side effect of the pill.
- If you miss a menstrual period, and you have missed any pills in your birth control cycle, you may be pregnant.
- If you think you are pregnant, you can do an at-home pregnancy test.

Irregular bleeding

- Random spotting or even light bleeding is very common during the first three cycles of birth control pills. If spotting or light bleeding persists beyond three months, your birth control prescription may need to be changed. If random bleeding persists after the first three cycles of birth control pills, or if you have heavy bleeding between your periods, please call our office.