

Birth Control Pills: Why, When, How and What

Why

Birth control pills are used for a variety of reasons. They contain hormones similar to the ones your body makes. Taking the hormones interrupts your usual menstrual cycle and interferes with your ovary releasing an egg. This helps **prevent pregnancy** about 90% of the time. In addition, most women notice more **regular cycles, shorter and lighter periods and fewer cramps.**

The pill does **NOT** protect against sexually transmitted infections or HIV. If you are sexually active, always use a condom to protect yourself.



When

There are 2 ways to start the pill:

- **Quick Start:** Take your first pill as soon as you get the pack.
- **Next period:** Take your first pill soon after your next period begins.
 - If you take your first pill *up to 5 days after the start of your period*, you are protected against pregnancy **right away**.
 - If you take your first pill *more than 5 days after the start of your period*, you should **use condoms as back-up for the first 7 days**.

How

Once you start using the pill, take 1 pill each day. Take your pill at the same time each day.

- After you finish a pack of pills, you should start a new pack the next day. You should have NO day without a pill.
- **I forgot ONE pill:** Take your pill as soon as you can.
- **I forgot TWO pills or more:** Take your pill as soon as you can. Take your next pill at the usual time. **Use condoms for 7 days. Use emergency contraception (EC) if you have unprotected sex.**

What

Benefits: Lighter, more regular periods, fewer cramps, perhaps clearer skin, lower chance of cancer of the uterus and ovaries

Will I Feel: For the first 2-3 months, some women experience mild nausea, breast tenderness, mild bleeding between periods, and slight weight gain (average 3 pounds in the first year.)

Side Effects: Birth control pills are very safe. Serious side effects are rare. However, if you have a family history of trouble with blood clots, you should find an alternative treatment. You increase your chance of safety if you do NOT smoke or vape. However, if you develop leg pain or swelling, severe chest pain, bad headache, or weakness or numbness on one side of your body, call immediately.