
Get the facts about... Birth Control Pills

Choosing birth control...

There are two ways to enjoy sex without getting pregnant...sex other than vaginal intercourse or vaginal intercourse with birth control. The use of birth control is an individual and private matter. It affects your body, relationships and lifestyle. There is no perfect choice in birth control. Get the facts you need and talk to people you trust. Choose a method that's right for you. Always use latex condoms along with your birth control method to lower your chances of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV - the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Why choose the Pill?

The birth control pill, or the "Pill," is a popular method of preventing pregnancy. It is about 97% to 99% effective in preventing pregnancy.

Does it protect me from STIs and HIV?

The Pill does not protect against sexually transmitted infections. Always use a latex condom when you have sex to reduce your risk of getting an STI or HIV infection.

How does the Pill work?

The Pill contains synthetic estrogen and progesterone. These hormones stop your ovaries from releasing an ovum (egg) each month. When there is no egg, pregnancy cannot occur.

The Pill makes the cervical mucus thicker. This makes it harder for sperm to get into the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the uterus (the womb).

The lining of the uterus gets thinner so it is harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus.

Where can I get the birth control pill?

You must get a prescription from a doctor. When you get the Pill, your doctor will check your blood pressure, ask about your health and your family's health, and for women 25 years and older, will do a breast exam. Your doctor may also do an internal examination either before you start taking the Pill or after you have been taking it for about three months.

How do I use the birth control pill?

Birth control pills come in packs of 21 days or 28 days. Your doctor or other health care provider will tell you how to start the Pill. Finish your pack by taking one pill every day at the same time. Take the Pill orally (swallow it) each day.

21-Day Package

- If you are using a 21-day package, you take one pill at the **same time every day** for 21 days. Take seven days off after finishing the package. Then start another package.
- You cannot get pregnant during the week you are not taking the pills.
- You will likely have your period during these seven days.

28-Day Package

- If you are using a 28-day package, take one pill at the **same time every day** for 28 days. Don't skip any days between packages.
- The last seven pills are a different color, and do not contain hormones. These pills help you remember to take your pill every day at the same time. They also help you remember when to start taking your new package of pills.
- You cannot get pregnant during these seven days.
- You will likely have your period during these seven days.

Are there any side effects?

Minor side-effects...

When you begin taking the Pill you may feel some minor side effects. These problems are not dangerous. If the minor side-effects are very uncomfortable or last longer than a few months, ask your doctor about changing from one brand of pill to another.

- nausea (sometimes taking the Pill with food or before bedtime helps get rid of nausea)
- headaches
- tiredness
- depression or sadness
- weight change
- less interest in sex
- sore breasts
- acne (pimples)
- bleeding between periods
- very light or missed periods
- increased hair growth

Serious side-effects...

A very small number of women suffer more serious side-effects. These include heart attacks, strokes, blood clots in veins, high blood pressure, gallbladder disease, liver tumors, and migraine headaches.

See a doctor immediately if you have...

- abdominal pain (severe)
- chest pain (severe), cough, shortness of breath
- headache (severe), dizziness

- weakness or numbness
- eye problems (vision loss or blurring)
- speech problems
- severe leg pain (calf or thigh)
- breast lumps
- severe depression

Your doctor will help you decide if you can take the Pill.

What if I miss a Pill?

If you miss one pill, take it as soon as you remember it. Take the next pill at the usual time. **Be sure to use another method of birth control** (condoms with spermicide, sponge or diaphragm) **or don't have vaginal intercourse for the rest of your pill package.**

If you miss two pills, take two pills as soon as you remember and two pills the next day at your regular time. Keep taking the rest of your pills as usual. **Be sure to use another method of birth control** (condoms with spermicide, sponge or diaphragm) **or don't have vaginal intercourse for the rest of your pill package.**

If you forget three or more pills in a row, start using another method of birth control right away and contact your doctor for instructions.

When you forget to take a pill(s) you may start to bleed (spotting). This is normal. Continue taking your pills. **Be sure to use another method of birth control** (condoms with spermicide, sponge, or diaphragm) **or don't have vaginal intercourse for the rest of your pill package.**

Throwing up or having diarrhea one to four hours after you take your pill may flush the Pill from your body. This may mean the Pill is not working. **Be sure to use another method of birth control** (condoms with spermicide, sponge, or diaphragm) **or don't have vaginal intercourse for the rest of your pill package.**

Some drugs that you take can stop the Pill from working. These include antibiotics like Ampicillin and Tetracycline, cold or allergy medicine containing anti-histamines, sedatives that help you sleep or relax, antacids, and certain anti-convulsants. **Tell your doctor or pharmacist that you are on the Pill if you take any drugs. While you are taking these drugs, continue taking the Pill and use another birth control method.**

What if I miss my period?

Sometimes you can miss a period even if you have taken all your pills the right way. This can be a normal side-effect of the Pill or you **might** be pregnant. Keep taking your pills and have a pregnancy test to find out whether or not you are pregnant.

If you miss periods often, ask your doctor about using a different type of birth control pill.

If you have missed any pills and miss a period, have a pregnancy test done right away.

What are the advantages of taking the Pill?

- You don't have to think about birth control when you have sex.
- The Pill is an effective method of birth control if you take it correctly and regularly.
- Your period will be regular, and you may not bleed as much.
- Women who are over 35 years of age and don't smoke can take the Pill.

What are the disadvantages of the Pill?

- You need a prescription to get the Pill.
- The Pill can cost a lot. If cost is a problem, contact your public health nurse or community health clinic.
- The Pill does not protect you from STIs including HIV infection.
- The Pill is not safe for all women to use. Smoking while taking the Pill increases your chances of serious side effects.
- You must remember to take it at the same time every day.

Remember...

The Pill is most effective when you take one every day at the same time. To help you remember, combine taking the Pill with something else you do every day at the same time, such as before going to bed, eating a meal, or brushing your teeth.

The Pill does not work right away. Use another birth control method such as condoms with foam, sponge, or diaphragm for the first month you are taking the Pill.

The Pill protects against pregnancy but does not protect against STIs.

The Pill does not protect against pregnancy once you stop taking it.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information from your public health nurse, community health clinic, doctor or pharmacist.

You can call the **Facts of Life Line** to talk about birth control, sexuality, relationships, STIs, and pregnancy options. **Call 947-9222 in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-432-1957.**

You can also check out this website: www.serc.mb.ca.