

Description – Birth control Pills contain hormones similar to the hormones your body produces and work primarily by preventing your ovaries from releasing an egg each month. These hormones also prevent pregnancy by thickening cervical mucus which makes it harder for sperm to enter the uterus as well as thinning the lining of the uterus which may prevent a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus.

Starting the Pills - Below are 3 ways you can begin taking your pills. Follow the method which your health care provider recommends. A back-up method of contraception (condoms) is recommended during the entire first cycle of pills.

Sunday Start - Take the first pill of the first pack on the Sunday after your period starts whether or not you are still bleeding. If your period starts on Sunday, start the pack that same day. Each new pack will begin on Sunday.

First Day Start – Take the first pill on the first day of your period, whatever the day of the week.

Quick Start Method – Take your first pill on the day you receive your prescription.

Taking the Pills – Take your pills at the same time each day. Once you start taking birth control pills you will be taking a pill **every day** even during your period. **When you finish a pack of birth control pills start the next pill pack even if your period has not ended.** Missing birth control pills could result in “breakthrough bleeding” as well as pregnancy.

Side Effects - The most common side effect of birth control pills is having bleeding between periods. This is also called “breakthrough bleeding”. You may notice light spotting or have a flow similar to your regular period. Breakthrough bleeding is more likely to occur during the first 3 months you take the pill and may occur regularly if you skip pills or are late taking your pills.

Minor Side Effects – Potential side effects include: nausea, breast tenderness, change in appetite, weight gain, mild headaches, depressed mood, and increased irritability. **If you experience any of these minor symptoms the doctor will want you to complete 3 cycles of the prescribed pill before switching to another brand of pills or other birth control option.** Call your health care provider if any of these side effects are severe.

Serious Side Effects – Side effects you need to watch for include chest pain, pain in the calf, leg or groin, depression, swelling of the hands or ankles, shortness of breath, vision problems, fainting, coughing up blood, severe headaches, and abdominal pain or swelling. Cigarette smoking increases the risk of serious cardiovascular side effects such as blood clots, or stroke.

Continuous Dosing - Some women will skip the placebo pills (sugar pills) and continue with the next cycle of hormone pills in order

to skip a period. This is called continuous dosing and requires authorization from your health care provider. If interested in this method, talk to your health care provider. This method may not be appropriate for everyone.

What if I miss a Pill? - Take it as soon as you remember and take the next pill at your regular time. If you don't remember until the next day, take two pills – the one you skipped and the one for that day. If you missed two pills in a row, take two pills each day for the next two days. Remember – any time you miss a pill you need to use a back up method of birth control such as condoms for the remainder of the pill pack.

What if I miss a Period? If you miss a period and have taken your pills exactly on schedule your chances of being pregnant are small. If you have used the “Pill” daily as directed, have not had vomiting or diarrhea or have not been on any new medications, then continue with your daily pill. If you go on to miss two periods in a row, have missed pills, been on new medication, or suffered from vomiting or diarrhea prior to the missed period then a pregnancy test is recommended (available at the Counseling and Health Center).

What if I have bleeding or spotting between periods? - This “break through bleeding” may occur when just starting pills or if you forget pills. For most women this stops after completing several cycles of the “Pill”, especially if you take each dose at the same time each day. If spotting continues or if bleeding increases in amount you will need to contact your health care provider.

Danger Signs – If you experience any of these, seek immediate medical attention. To remember these signs think of **ACHES**:

- A = Abdominal pain (severe)**
- C = Chest pain (severe) or shortness of breath**
- H = Headaches (severe)**
- E = Eye problems (blurred vision or loss of vision)**
- S = Severe leg pains (in calf or thigh)**

Blood clots are more likely to occur in **women who smoke or women over the age of 35.**

Birth control pills do not protect against HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. Use a condom every time you have sex to protect against infections.

For after hours emergencies call 911 or go to the emergency room.
References: www.plannedparenthood.org