

BIRTH CONTROL PILL INSTRUCTIONS

Oral contraception is made up of two hormones, estrogen and progestin. These medications are prescribed to women not only for contraception, but often for other reasons including treatment of heavy or irregular bleeding, severe cramps, and even acne.

Prevention of pregnancy when taking birth control pills occurs due to suppression of ovulation. As long as no pills are missed, oral contraception is 99.3% effective in preventing pregnancy.

If, however, only two pills are missed in a row, it is possible that ovulation and conception could occur. This quick return to normal ovarian function demonstrates that the birth control pill will have no long lasting effects on fertility when pregnancy is desired in the future.

STARTING THE MEDICATION

To begin taking this medicine, you must wait for your next menstrual cycle to begin. You will then take your first pill in your pill pack on the Sunday after your period begins. It does not matter if your menstrual bleeding has stopped or not.

YOU MUST USE CONDOMS THE FIRST PACK OF PILLS. THE PILL WILL NOT PREVENT PREGNANCY THE FIRST MONTH.

It does not matter what time of day you take the pill, but it is best if you try to remember it at the same time every day. Your period will begin in the middle of the week of the placebo tablets. You will then begin the second pack of pills immediately after finishing the placebo pills of the first pack. You may still be bleeding when starting the next pack.

COMMON ADJUSTMENT SYMPTOMS

1. **BREAK-THROUGH-BLEEDING**, or bleeding at any time during the month other than the placebo week, is very common for the first one to three months of starting the pill. It is harmless, and it is recommended that you ignore it unless it has happened for three months in a row. If this occurs, call the office. You will probably be prescribed a different pill.
2. **NAUSEA** is also a common side effect of this medication. If this occurs, it can be helpful to take the pill in the morning with food. If this does not help, please call the office for advice.
3. **FLUID RETENTION** including abdominal bloating can occur due to the pill, but it is often temporary and diminishes after three months of the medication.
4. **WEIGHT GAIN** is unlikely on today's low-dose birth control pills according to numerous studies. Many people gain weight for other reasons and mistakenly believe it is due to the pill. If you are gaining weight, call the office before stopping this medication.
5. **DEPRESSION** or mood changes are also unlikely unless you have a tendency toward depression. If so, this is important to discuss with us.

HEALTH RISKS OF THE MEDICATION

The main risk of this medication is that of a blood clot. This is very rare in healthy people who have never had a blood clot, do not have high blood pressure, do not smoke over the age of 35-years-old, or have any other reason to be at risk for a blood clot. Part of your annual exam at this office is to make sure that you are safe to begin and then continue this medication each year.

The following list of symptoms ("**ACHES**") could indicate a blood clot in your body. If you have any of these symptoms, please call the office immediately or go to the emergency room.

Abdominal pain which is severe
Chest pain which is severe or shortness of breath
Headaches which are severe or daily headaches
Eye problems like blurred vision, flashing lights, blindness in one eye
Severe leg pain in the calf or inner thigh

HEALTH BENEFITS OF THE MEDICATION

For many women, the most important benefit of pill use is the prevention of unwanted pregnancy. Difficult ethical decisions such as abortion or adoption of an unwanted pregnancy can be avoided by using oral contraception.

In addition to this significant benefit to the lives of women, there are many benefits of pill use to women's overall health that are often not well known by the public. Current studies of low-dose birth control pill use in healthy women show no adverse effects with longterm use and in fact have found the following benefits:

1. Decrease in risk of ovarian and uterine cancer
2. No increase or decrease in risk of breast cancer
3. Prevention of ovarian cysts
4. Decrease in bleeding which prevents anemia
5. Regulation of menstrual cycle
6. Decrease in menstrual cramps
7. Possible decrease in PMS symptoms
8. Treatment of acne
9. Decrease in risk of endometriosis**
10. Decrease in risk of ectopic pregnancy**
11. Decrease in risk of PID (pelvic inflammatory disease) from gonorrhea or chlamydia**

**Endometriosis, ectopic pregnancy, and PID can damage the fallopian tubes which could lead to infertility.

Many myths remain about pill use as well. For example, there is no need to take a "break" from pills in healthy women at any time. There is also no age at which a healthy nonsmoker cannot safely take the pill. In other words, there are no known medical reasons that healthy nonsmokers cannot safely take the pill from teenage years to menopause without any breaks.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU MISS PILLS

Missing your birth control pills can put you at risk of pregnancy. Follow these instructions to prevent conception:

1. If you miss ONE PILL, take it as soon as you remember, then take your next pill at the regular time. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO USE CONDOMS WHEN MISSING ONLY ONE PILL.**
2. If you miss TWO PILLS IN A ROW, take two pills as soon as you remember, then take two the next day at the regular time. Do not ever take more than two pills in one day. **YOU MUST USE CONDOMS THE REST OF THAT PILL PACK.**
3. If you miss THREE PILLS IN A ROW, throw away the entire pack, **USE CONDOMS**, and wait for your period to begin. Start the next pack of pills on the Sunday after your period begins. **USE CONDOMS THIS FIRST PACK.** This is like starting over.

Please call us with any problems you experience or questions you may have while taking the birth control pill. Most problems and concerns can be easily helped over the phone. Finally, please remember to tell other health care providers that you are taking this medication.