

Oral Contraceptives

How do oral contraceptives (the pill) work? What are the benefits and risks?

The pill works primarily by stopping ovulation (release of an egg), or preventing implantation of an egg in the lining of the uterus, and thickening the cervical mucus to prevent sperm from meeting the egg. In addition to preventing pregnancy, the pill decreases the risk for ovarian and endometrial cancer, benign breast masses, and ovarian cysts. Pills also decrease menstrual bleeding, cramps, some symptoms of PMS and depression, and make oily skin and acne better. There are also risks associated with use of the Pill. These risks include cardiovascular disease such as stroke, heart attack. Smoking increases these risks, as does your age. Some cancers have been associated with use of the Pill, but other factors contribute to this. Talk to your nurse practitioner if you are concerned. The rate of women with accidental pregnancy within the first year of typical use is 9.04% (with perfect use 0.34%).

Starting your Pills The pill can be started whenever a woman is certain she is not pregnant.

The Quick Start Method:

A. You may start taking your pills today if you are reasonably certain you are not pregnant. You may be prescribed emergency contraception if you have had unprotected vaginal sex within the past five (5) days. You will need to use a back up method for 7 days. If you have concerns about an undetectable early pregnancy, you may take a pregnancy test in two weeks at the clinic or at home. The hormones in the pills will not affect an early pregnancy.

B. You need to abstain from intercourse for two weeks and take a pregnancy test (It takes 2 weeks from the last act of intercourse to show a positive pregnancy test). If the pregnancy test is negative, and you have not had intercourse for 2 weeks, then you can start the pill that day. You must use a back up method of birth control (condoms), especially for the first 7 days because there is still a chance you can ovulate. Your next period will be delayed until you complete the active pills in your first pack.

First Day Start:

The pill can work most effectively if you start within the first few days (days 1-5) of your menstrual cycle. By the time you ovulate, the pill should be effective in preventing pregnancy. It is safest to still use a back up method of birth control for the first 7 days.

When should I take my pill?

Take your pill at the same time every day. Choose a time that is convenient for you. If you can, take it with the same daily activity (like breakfast, bedtime, brushing your teeth) so it will be easier to remember. It is best to take your pill within one hour before or one hour after your set time.

Do I need a back up method of birth control?

- ◆ If you are late starting a new pack of pills and have not had intercourse since your last period, you can start taking your pills today and use a back up method for 7 days.
- ◆ If you are late in starting a new pack of pills and have unprotected intercourse, call the office for Emergency Contraception (**Plan B**) and you will need to rule out pregnancy before starting on your pills again. **Plan B** and is available over-the-counter for women age 18 and older. It is available for all women by prescription at Family Planning Services during our supply visit hours.

- ◆ Use backup method for 7 days anytime you miss taking your pill by 12 hours. If a back up method is not used, you should use emergency contraception (Plan B).
- ◆ You may also have breakthrough bleeding if you miss a pill or have to double up. Keep taking your pills and use a back up method for 7 days. Ibuprofen (Aleve, Motrin) may help with cramping or bleeding. Take as directed.
- ◆ If you are taking antibiotics or medication that interferes with effectiveness of your pills.
- ◆ Refer to your package insert for any questions about missed pills

What side effects ca I expect?

When first starting the pill, you may have none or some of the following side effects. This is due to your body adjusting to the new hormones.

- ◆ Nausea: Do not stop taking your pills, try eating something before taking it.
- ◆ Break-through bleeding: Do not stop your pills. Make sure you are taking them on time every day. This problem will go away.
- ◆ Breast tenderness/fullness.
- ◆ Mild headache.

What are the dangerous, rare, side effects of the pill?

If you have any of the following symptoms **stop the pill** and go to the nearest emergency room.

Abdominal pain (severe)

Chest pain (severe)

Headaches (severe)

Eye pain or vision changes

Severe leg pain