

The Birth Control Pill

What is the birth control pill?

- The birth control pill (the pill) is taken by someone with ovaries inside their body to prevent pregnancy.
- It contains artificial hormones similar to the natural hormones that already exist in the body.

How does the pill work?

- The pill stops the ovaries from releasing an egg cell each month. If there is no egg cell, pregnancy is not possible.
- The pill makes the cervical mucus thicker so that it is harder for sperm to get into the cervix.
- It also makes the lining of the uterus thinner, so that it is harder for a fertilized egg cell to stick to the uterus. Even if an egg cell is released and fertilized, if it is unable to implant into the uterine lining a pregnancy will not happen.
- When used correctly, the pill prevents pregnancy 97-99% of the time.

How do I use the pill?

Your health care provider will tell you when and how to start the pill. Birth control pills come in packs of 21 or 28 pills. The first 21 pills in both types of packs contain hormones. In the 28 pack, the last 7 pills do not contain hormones. Instead, these are reminder pills to help you to remember to take a pill every day. Remember:

- When you first start taking the pill, it is a good idea to also use an additional birth control method, such as condoms, for the first 14 days.
- Take 1 pill every day at the same time of day.
- Take the pill orally (swallow it).
- Follow the directions on the package to take the pills in the correct order.
- Finish the package.
- If you have a 21 pack, start a new pack of pills after 7 days off.
- If you have a 28 pack, start a new pack of pills when the last pill is finished.

You should get your period during the 7 days off (if you are taking the 21 pack) or while you are taking the last 7 pills of the 28 pack. It may not start immediately, and for some people it may be very light, or not come at all. If you are taking the 21 pack, you cannot get pregnant during the week you are not taking the pills unless you have not taken your pills correctly.

Where can I get the pill?

You will need a prescription for the pill. You can get a prescription from:

- Your health care provider
- A Teen Clinic (for youth 21 or younger)
- A walk-in clinic
- A community health clinic

Does the pill protect me from STIs and HIV?

- No, the pill is only for pregnancy prevention.
- Use safer sex supplies such as condoms and sex dams every time you have sex to reduce the risk of STIs (sexually transmitted infection) or HIV.

Will the pill affect my period?

- The birth control pill should help make your period become more predictable.
- You may not bleed as much.
- Your cramps may feel lighter.

Are there any side effects?

You may feel some side effects. If they are very uncomfortable or last longer than a few months, talk to your health care provider. Smoking while taking the pill increases the chance of serious side effects.

Common minor side effects may include:

- Bleeding between periods
- Breast discomfort
- Nausea. Sometimes taking the pill with food or before bedtime can help with this.

Uncommon minor side effects may include:

- Headaches
- Weight changes
- Less interest in sex
- Changes in acne (pimples)
- Mood changes or depression. If this affects your mental wellbeing, talk with your health care provider about alternative options

Serious side effects:

A very small number of people suffer side effects that are more serious. These include heart attacks, strokes, blood clots in veins, high blood pressure, gallbladder disease, liver tumors, and migraine headaches. Talk with your health care provider about any pre-existing health conditions before starting birth control.

See a doctor immediately if you have:

- Severe abdominal (stomach) pain
- Severe chest pain or breathing problems
- Severe headache, dizziness
- Weakness or numbness in any part of your body
- Eye problems (vision loss or blurring)
- Speech problems
- Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)
- Jaundice (yellow skin)

Does anything stop the pill from working?

- Throwing up or having diarrhea up to two hours after you take your pill may mean that the dose will not work. Talk to your health care provider as soon as you can, or call Health Links at 204-788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257 to ask what to do. To be safe, it is a good idea to use another method of birth control such as condoms for the rest of your pill package.
- Some prescriptions or drugs that you take can stop the pill from working. If you take any other prescriptions or drugs, tell your health care provider or pharmacist.

- Some people will initially feel nauseous on the pill, but vomiting is rare. If you vomit within one hour of taking a pill, you must take another pill. The pill may not work if you have persistent vomiting or diarrhea. Use another birth control method such as condoms until your symptoms are gone and until you have been on a new pack of pills for at least one week.
- Talk with your health care provider if you have any questions.

What if forget to take a pill?

- Take it as soon as possible.
- Contact your health care provider or pharmacist to talk about how to continue.
- Consider using another birth control method, such as condoms, for 14 days.

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.
- Pregnancy may be a possibility if having penis-vagina sex, especially if you missed any pills.
- Keep taking your pills and consider getting a pregnancy right away. Pregnancy tests can be purchased at pharmacies, or done through your health care provider, at a community health centre, or a Teen Clinic (for youth 21 or younger).
- Talk with your health care provider if you miss your periods often.

Remember:

- The pill is most effective when you take one every day at the same time.
- To help you remember, consider combining taking the pill with something else you do every day at the same time, such as going to bed, eating a meal, or brushing your teeth. Or set a reminder on your phone.
- The pill does not work right away. Consider using another birth control method such as condoms for the first week or two weeks.
- 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?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse. If you need a regular health care provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life Online: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.
- From a Teen Clinic if you are 21 or younger.
- Online at www.serc.mb.ca or our youth website, www.teentalk.ca.