

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES  
Oral Contraceptive (Birth Control Pills) Information Sheet

How the Birth Control Pill Works

Birth control pills contain synthetic forms of estrogen and progesterone, hormones that are normally found in a woman's body. They prevent ovulation, create thick mucus that helps prevent sperm from entering the uterus and make the uterine lining very thin.

EFFECTIVENESS RATES

If taken consistently and correctly, the pill is 99+% effective in preventing pregnancy; typical use is 95%. If a woman misses pills or does not follow instructions, the effectiveness is reduced.

HOW TO START BIRTH CONTROL PILLS

\*The 28-pill pack has 21 hormone pills and 7 "reminder" pills (without hormones).

\*Decide what time of day you want to take your pills. Associate it with something you do at the same time every day like brushing your teeth or eating a meal. Setting an alarm on your cell phone or watch is helpful. It is important to take your pill at the same time everyday. Don't skip pills.

\*Unless you are instructed differently, start your first hormone pill the Sunday after you start your period even if you are still bleeding. If your period begins on Sunday, take your first pill that day.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

\*You must use a back up method for the first 7 days you begin taking the pill. If you miss pills, were late starting a pack or if you have severe vomiting or diarrhea, we recommend consistent condom use.

\*When you finish your pill pack, start a new one the next day; do not wait any days between packs.

\*The riskiest time to miss a pill is at the beginning or end of the pill pack. If you are concerned that you are not adequately protected, call 685-2470 and ask to speak with a nurse.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

\*Spotting or bleeding between periods (break through bleeding) may occur during the first one or two packs. It may also occur if you miss or are late taking your pills.

\*Mild nausea may be prevented by taking your pill with food or at bedtime.

\*Breast tenderness/slight bloating/weight gain will usually resolve in the first month or two.

\*Periods may be shorter, lighter with less cramps. Some women's periods are only one day of spotting and some women miss their period completely. If you have been taking your pills correctly, it is unlikely that you are pregnant. Continue your pills and if you miss a second period, call the clinic for possible pregnancy testing.

\*If you are experiencing side effects that are causing problems, call the Health Center.

RISKS

\*Although the medical risks for women taking birth control pills are statistically smaller than the medical risks of pregnancy, each woman must assume responsibility for her own health and contact the clinic if she has any unusual symptoms. These include: chest pain or leg pain, numbness in hands or feet, shortness of breath, severe or persistent headache, sudden visual changes or abdominal pain.

\*Women with a history of *blood clots* in their legs, lungs or brain should not take birth control pills. Neither should women with poor liver function, cancer of the breast, uterus or ovaries, or known or suspected pregnancy.

\*The risk of heart attack or other vascular disease is increased in women who take the pill, especially after the age of 35 or in the presence of such risk factors as being overweight, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol or SMOKING. Women who take the pill should NOT smoke. Smoking just one cigarette raises blood pressure, speeds up the heart rate, and increases your risk of heart disease.

ADVANTAGES OF TAKING THE PILL

- \*They are a convenient and effective birth control method.
- \*While on the pill periods are usually shorter, lighter, less crampy and more regular.
- \*There is some evidence the pill protects against ovarian and uterine cancer.

REMEMBER

If you are ill or seeking medical care, tell your provider that you are taking birth control pills; they may interact with other medications. It is your responsibility to let the clinician know if you are taking *any* medication (including herbal preparations) and what the dosage is. If you are taking any antibiotics while on birth control pills, you should continue your birth control pills and use a back up method such as condoms for the rest of the pill pack.

IF YOU FORGET 1 HORMONE PILL:

Take it as soon as you remember. This may mean taking 2 pills in one day or taking 2 pills at the same time. Take the next pill at the regular time. You do not need to use a back up method when you have sex.

IF YOU FORGET 2 HORMONE PILLS IN A ROW DURING WEEK 1 OR 2

Take 2 pills on the day you remember and 2 pills the next day. Then take one pill a day for the rest of the pack. Use a back-up method for 7 days or abstain from intercourse.

IF YOU FORGET 2 HORMONE PILLS IN A ROW DURING WEEK 3

Keep taking 1 pill every day until Sunday. On Sunday, throw out the rest of the pill pack and start a new pack of pills that day. Use a back-up method for 7 days. You may not have a period this month but this is expected. However, if you miss your period for 2 months in a row, call the Health Center for a pregnancy test.

IF YOU FORGET 3 OR MORE HORMONE PILLS IN A ROW (IN THE FIRST 3 WEEKS)

Keep taking one pill every day until Sunday. On Sunday throw out the rest of the pack and start a new pack of pills that day. Use a back-up method for 7 days. You may not have your period this month but this is expected. However if you miss 2 periods in a row, call the Health Center for a pregnancy test.

IF YOU FORGET ANY OF THE REMINDER PILLS

Throw out the pills you missed and keep taking a pill each day until the pack is empty. You do not need a back-up.

Finally, if you are not sure what to do about the pills you have missed:

Use a back-up method anytime you have sex.

Keep taking one pill each day until you can reach the Health Center.

Be aware that if you miss pills you may spot or bleed. This will go away.

Birth control pills do not protect against sexually transmitted infection. Only condoms can prevent the spread of HPV, Herpes, HIV, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia and Syphilis.

I have read the Oral Contraceptive Information Sheet; it has been explained fully. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and I understand the information.

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