

## Combined Oral Contraceptives -The Pill

Combined oral contraceptives are an excellent choice for preventing pregnancy. Over the course of a year, taken consistently, every day, only 1 in 100 people will have an unplanned pregnancy. If they are not always used correctly, 8 out of 100 people using them will get pregnant each year.

### How do I start the pill?

#### **Quick Start**

You can start taking the pill today if you like! If you are reasonably sure you are not pregnant, you can start taking your pill today. After you finish your first pill pack, if you don't get a period, then you will need to have a pregnancy test. (It is not dangerous to be pregnant and take birth control pills!)

#### **Sunday Start**

Some people find it easier to remember if they have taken their pills if they start taking the pills on a Sunday. By always starting on a Sunday a person can count the days of the week to help remember to take the pill. You can start this Sunday or wait until the Sunday after the first day of your next period.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Day Start**

Start taking pill on the first day of their period. No back-up protection is required.

### How do I take the pill?

#### **Every Day**

The most challenging part of taking birth control pills is remembering to take the pill every day. Missed pills can cause unplanned pregnancies. Not every person can remember to take a pill every day. If you are missing more than one pill a month, consider talking to us about other ways to prevent pregnancy.

Some things people do to remember to take the pill every day include:

- Setting an alarm at home or on your phone.
- Keeping the pills with you in your bag.
- Tying your pill to your toothbrush or coffee cup.

#### **Same Time**

New birth control pills use the lowest dose of hormones that will effectively prevent pregnancy. Because of the low doses people may have unexpected spotting or irregular period. Typically this bothersome side effect goes away in 2 to 3 months. You can reduce your chances of this by being very careful to take your pill at the same time every day. If the spotting or irregular period is bothering you or you are experiencing pain, talk to us.

### When am I Protected from Pregnancy?

You are protected from pregnancy when you have taken the pill every day for seven days. In the first month of the pill you must use a back-up method for the first seven days (unless you started your pill on the first day of your period). After that you are protected. If you miss more than one pill a month may not be protected from pregnancy and need to use condoms. If you have questions about missed pills and protection, please call the Nurse Advice line or talk with a clinician.

### Missed Pills

If you miss one pill, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss two pills, then take two the day you remember, two the following day to catch up with the pack, and use a back-up birth control for the remainder of the month. Consider buying some condoms and emergency contraceptive at the pharmacy to have at home just in case.

Stopping the pill for more than 7 days risks the chance of pregnancy, so don't forget to have condoms and emergency contraceptive at hand. It is never necessary to "rest" your body from your birth control pills. If you stop taking these pills for more than 7 days you risk getting pregnant.

### **Optional Period (continuous use)**

Some people choose to skip the period they have at the end of every pill pack. With birth control pills this is safe. You might do this for convenience (going camping) or you may do this for as long as you like. Continuous use requires more refills, so if you like this idea, let us know. If you want to use the pill continuously, please talk to a nurse, the pharmacist, or your provider for specific instructions.

### **Side Effects**

Low dose contraceptives do not have the kind of side effects experienced by people a generation ago. The most bothersome side effects are a result of changes in the uterus from the hormones. You may experience spotting, irregular periods or even a missed period. To avoid this take the pill at the same time every day. It is however, normal to have spotting or irregular bleeding, breast tenderness or nausea in the first couple of months when taking the pill. These effects should go away, and if they don't then we can change you to a new pill.

Very large studies have shown no increase in nausea, headaches, mood changes, libido, breast problems or weight between people taking the pill and people who are not taking the pill. Still, every person is unique and regardless of the research, you may experience side effects. If you experience serious mood changes, significant weight change or any other symptom after taking the pill, please come and talk to us.

### **WARNINGS**

Oral contraceptives contain synthetic forms of estrogen and progesterone. All birth control methods that contain these hormones raise a person's risk of having a blood clot. A blood clot can occur in your head, heart, legs or lungs. This is a very serious potential risk of hormone contraception. When you think about the risk of a clot remember that the pill is keeping you from getting pregnant. The risk of getting a blood clot is significantly higher for people who are pregnant or have just given birth.

#### Serious Adverse Effects/ ACHES

- A – abdominal pain, severe
- C – chest pain, shortness of breath, coughing blood
- H – headaches, severe
- E – eye problems, vision loss/blurry
- S – severe leg/calf pain or swelling

If you experience any of these then seek medical attention and remember to mention that you are using hormone contraception.

For complete information about this contraceptive, read your package insert.

For more information or if you have more questions, talk to one of our nurses.

Nurse Advice Line is 831-459-2951.

**Oral contraceptives do not protect you against sexually transmitted infections. You must still use a condom, practice safer sex and get regular STI testing to reduce your risk of an STI and identify problems early.**