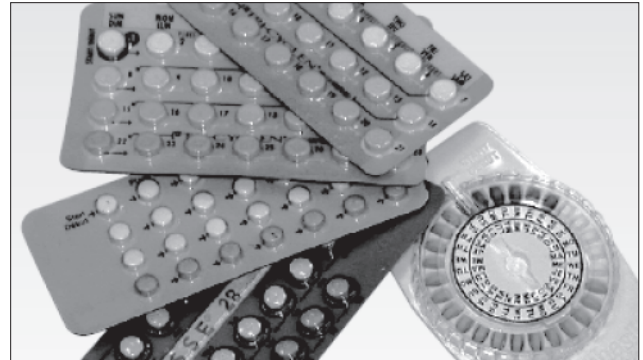


# Birth Control Pill (The Pill)

## What is the birth control pill?

- The birth control pill is taken every day to prevent pregnancy.
- The pill contains hormones that are similar to a woman's natural hormones. The hormones in the pill stop your ovary from releasing an egg each month. You cannot get pregnant if your body does not release an egg.



## How well does the pill work?

- With typical use, the pill is 92–97 percent effective.
- With perfect use, the pill is 99.9 percent effective.
- Most pregnancies happen because women forget to take their pills.

## How do I start taking the pill?

- See your healthcare provider. You need a prescription for the pill.
- Take one pill each day at the same time.
- There are different ways to start the first package.
  - If you start the pill on the first day of your period, it works right away.
  - If you start the pill on day 2–5 of your period, you need to use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms) for 7 days.
  - If you start the pill on the Sunday after your period, you need to use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms) for 7 days.

## To use a 28-day pack:

- There are two types of 28 day packages:
  - The first 21 pills have hormones. The last 7 pills do not (hormone-free).
  - The first 24 pills have hormones. The last 4 pills do not (hormone-free).
- Take one pill each day at the same time for 28 days.
- You will get your period when you are taking the hormone-free pills. You are still protected from pregnancy during this time.
- When the pack is finished, start a new pack the next day.

### To use a 21-day pack:

- Take one pill each day at the same time for 21 days.
- When the pack is done, **wait 7 days** before you start a new pack. You will get your period when you are not taking pills (hormone-free break). You are still protected from pregnancy during this time.
- At the end of the hormone-free break, start a new pack.
- Do not take more than a 7 day hormone-free break.

### What if I forget to take a pill?

- **At any time**, if it is **less than 24 hours** since you forgot to take a pill:
  - Take it right away. You might take two pills on the same day.
  - Continue taking one pill every day at the same time.
  - You are still protected from pregnancy.

Missing any pills (especially at the beginning or end of the pack), can increase your risk of pregnancy. If you forget to take a pill and it is **more than 24 hours**, follow the instructions below.

| First Week of the Pill   | Second or Third Week of the Pill  |   |
|--|---|---|
| Forget 1 or more pills   | Forget 1 or 2 pills   | Forget 3 or more pills  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take the missed pill right away.</li><li>• Take your next pill at the usual time (you might take two pills on the same day).</li><li>• Continue taking one pill every day.</li><li>• Use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms) for 7 days.</li><li>• If you have had unprotected sex in the last 5 days, or birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks), think about getting emergency contraception to help prevent pregnancy.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take 1 missed pill right away.</li><li>• Take your next pill at the usual time. <b>Never take more than 2 pills on the same day.</b></li><li>• If you are using a <b>21-day</b> pack, take 1 pill every day until your pill pack is finished. <b>Start a new pack right away.</b> Do not take the hormone-free break.</li><li>• If you are using a <b>28-day</b> pack, take 1 hormone pill each day until finished. <b>Do not</b> take the hormone-free pills. Throw them away and <b>start a new pack of pills right away.</b></li><li>• You might not get your period. You might have spotting or bleeding.</li><li>• You are still protected from pregnancy.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take 1 missed pill right away.</li><li>• Take your next pill at the usual time. <b>Never take more than 2 pills on the same day.</b></li><li>• If you are using a <b>21-day</b> pack, take 1 pill every day until your pill pack is finished. <b>Start a new pack right away.</b> Do not take the hormone-free break.</li><li>• If you are using a <b>28-day</b> pack, take 1 hormone pill each day until finished. <b>Do not</b> take the hormone-free pills. Throw them away and <b>start a new pack of pills right away.</b></li><li>• Use an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms) for 7 days.</li><li>• If you have had unprotected sex in the last 5 days, or birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks), think about getting emergency contraception to help prevent pregnancy.</li></ul> |

## Does it matter when I start my pill pack?

- **Always start your new pack of pills on time.**
- If you do not have your period, **start your new pill pack** and see your healthcare provider.
- If your period has not ended, **start your new pill pack**. Your period should stop in a few days.
- The hormone-free break must not be longer than 7 days.

## What are the side effects of the pill?

- There is a chance (especially in the first 3 months) that you might have:
  - feeling sick to your stomach
  - mild headaches
  - tender breasts
  - feeling moody
  - spotting or bleeding between periods
  - a bloated stomach
  - slight weight gain or loss

If you have any of these side effects, **do not stop taking the pill**. Talk to your healthcare provider. Most side effects get better after 3 months.

## Can the pill cause blood clots?

- In rare cases, women using the pill can develop a blood clot. The risk is higher if you:
  - smoke
  - have a family history of blood clots
  - have had a blood clot, heart attack, or stroke

## See your doctor right away or go to the nearest emergency room if you have:

- bad pain in your abdomen
- bad chest pain
- trouble breathing
- a bad headache
- numbness in your arms or legs
- bad leg pain
- eye problems (e.g., blurry vision or loss of vision)

## Important Things to Remember

- Your period might be more regular, lighter, or shorter with less cramping.
- You can get pregnant as soon as you stop using the pill.
- It is safe to take the pill for many years. There is no need to “take a break” from the pill.
- The pill protects you from certain types of cancer (ovary and uterus).
- Some medications can affect how the pill works. **Ask your pharmacist about any medications (prescription or over-the-counter) you are taking.**
- If you throw up within 1 hour of taking the pill, take the next pill in your package.
- The pill does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STI).
- Do not take the pill if you are pregnant, or think you might be.
- You can get pregnant if you don't take the pill properly.

*\*amended with permission from Alberta Health and Wellness SX0020*

## **Sexual Decision Making**

- Choose to have sex or not—you have the right to make that decision.
- Choose to protect yourself from getting pregnant and STIs.
- Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STIs.
- Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.

## **For More Information Call:**

### **Sexual and Reproductive Health**

Education/Health Promotion                      403-955-6515

### **Clinical Services**

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre              5<sup>th</sup> floor, 1213–4<sup>th</sup> St SW                      403-955-6500

South Calgary Health Centre                      31 Sunpark Plaza SE                              403-943-9510

Sunridge Professional Building                      406, 2675–36<sup>th</sup> St NE                              403-944-7666

### **Website**

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth)

For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary Area or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

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*This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.*