



PATIENT GUIDE

USING YOUR ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES CORRECTLY & SAFELY

Oral contraceptives have been available for over 40 years. During that time, they have been studied extensively and improved many times. Today's pills are considered quite safe and have few side effects. In fact, for most women, taking the pill is much safer than having a baby.

For your pills to work, you must remember two important things about taking them:

1. When to start each pill pack –

- Your first pill pack is started either on the first day of your period (the first day of bleeding) or on the first Sunday after your period starts. We will discuss which start method is better for you during your office visit. Once you have chosen one method or the other, it is important that each new pill pack be started on the same day of the week no matter when your subsequent period starts or ends. In general, if you start the pack on the first day of the period, you will not need any backup birth control and will get the full contraceptive effect immediately. If you use the Sunday start method, you need a backup method of birth control (such as condoms) for seven days. However, usually you will have period free weekends with this method.
- Another method is the 'Quick start' method. If you are absolutely sure that you could not be pregnant, then the pill can be started immediately. You need a backup method of birth control (such as condoms) for seven days.

2. When to take your pills –

- It is important to remember to take your pills at the same time each day. Choose the easiest time for you and be sure to continue taking them at the same time, or close to it, every day. Usually, taking them at nighttime before going to bed is the best and easiest time. This also helps reduce certain side effects of the pill such as nausea.

If you forget to take a pill –

As a rule, if you forget to take one pill, take it as soon as you remember. If you forget to take two or more pills in a row, take two pills every day until you catch up. However, you need to use a backup method of birth control (such as condoms) for seven days. If you have missed more than three pills, keep taking the pills as above but contact us so we can make further plans. Continue using backup contraception until we have discussed the situation.

Benefits – The pill has many benefits. These include: regular menses with decreased flow and decreased chance of anemia, decreased premenstrual tension, decreased acne, decreased cramping, decreased ovarian cysts, decreased chance of ectopic pregnancy, decreased fibrocystic disease of the breast, decreased pelvic infection, and decreased endometrial or ovarian cancer risk.

Side Effects – Like any medication, the pill has side effects. For the majority of women they are temporary, tolerable and usually resolve once the body gets used to the pill, which takes one to three months. However, it is important to be cautious and report any unusual side effects or problems.

The most common **side effects** noted are: Nausea, bloating, weight changes, and breast tenderness. Your skin can also become sensitive to the sun. There are also more serious, but relatively rare, side effects. These include: increased risk of blood clots and heart disease (especially if you are a smoker). Blood clots can effect the legs or eyes or cause strokes. Occasional increase in blood pressure can also occur. There is a small association with liver tumors, gall bladder disease, and possible effects on sugar and cholesterol levels. Recent studies have shown that the pill does not increase the long term risk of breast cancer. Women currently using the pill have a very slight increased risk of breast cancer, but that finding is likely due to more frequent and careful screening.

Contact your physician immediately to report any of the following problems:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe shortness of breath or chest pain
- Severe leg pain in calf or thigh
- Severe headaches
- Dizziness, weakness or numbness
- Eye problems such as vision loss or blurring
- Speech problems

Spotting or light bleeding – It is not unusual to get some irregular spotting or light bleeding between periods during the first three months of pill use. This usually will go away by itself. Missing pills can also cause spotting or light bleeding even when you make up the missed pills. If spotting continues after the first three months however, you should call and come in for a check up.

Weight – Despite popular belief, the pill does not make you fat. Most women who take the pill do not experience a change in weight. Attention to diet and exercise is of course very important.

Other medications – If you take certain medications, including antibiotics, your pills may not work well. As a rule, it is better to use a backup form of contraception (such as condoms) if you are on antibiotics. If you are on any other medications, please let me know so we can discuss their possible effects. It is also important to let your other doctors know that you are on the birth control pill.

Feel free to call or come in if you have any questions. Do not be afraid to ask. There are no “dumb” questions. While you are on the pill you should have a gynecologic exam every 6 – 12 months.

If you wish to get pregnant, stop the birth control pills 1 to 2 months before , and have 1 to 2 regular periods before trying. Come in for a preconception visit if possible.