

# Facts About Birth Control Pills ("THE PILL")



## What is "The Pill"?

The pill is a birth control medicine that you take by mouth every day to prevent pregnancy.

## How do pills work?

Birth control pills work by releasing female hormones in your body. The hormones keep your body from releasing an egg that could be fertilized by a man's sperm. The hormones also keep the man's sperm from reaching the woman's uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes, and make it hard for an egg to stick inside the uterus.

## How well do pills work?

Most women will NOT become pregnant if they take the pill every day. If you gave 100 females birth control pills, only 9 of them would become pregnant the first year. Women who miss pills get pregnant more often than women who take the pills every day.

## Why are pills a good choice for me?

- ▲ Pills are easy to use. When you take them the right way, they work very well.
- ▲ The pill often makes your periods shorter, lighter and more regular.
- ▲ Women who use the pill have less chance of getting cancer of the ovaries or of the uterus than women who do not use birth control

## Will I have problems if I take pills?

- ▲ The side effects of the birth control pills are similar to those of the vaginal ring and contraceptive patch.
- ▲ Most common reported side effects include: headache, nausea and breast tenderness.
- ▲ Most women do NOT have these problems, but VERY RARELY the pill could cause: blood clots, heart attacks and stroke.

## Is there anyone who should not take birth control pills?

Most women take pills without having any problems. You should not take birth control pills if you have any of the following conditions:

- ▲ 35 years or older and smoke, which increases the risk of heart attack and stroke
- ▲ Pregnant or suspected pregnancy
- ▲ Blood clots in your legs or lungs – now or in the past
- ▲ Chest pain, heart attack or stroke, diseases of the heart valves with complications
- ▲ High blood pressure
- ▲ Diabetes with complications of the kidneys, eyes, nerves or blood vessels or more than 20 years having diabetes
- ▲ Headaches with neurological symptoms (migraines with aura)
- ▲ Current breast cancer
- ▲ Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, liver tumors or active liver disease
- ▲ Less than 21 days after having a baby
- ▲ Need for a long period of bed rest following major surgery

## Facts About Birth Control Pills (“THE PILL”), cont.

### How do I take birth control pills?

To prevent your body from releasing an egg, swallow one pill each day. This must be done at about the same time each day so the same amount of medicine (hormones) is in your body at all times. The best way to do this is to take your pill at the same time each day you normally do something else. A good time to take your pill is when you go to bed or when you brush your teeth. Choose one of the following ways to start using the Pill:

You can start using the Pill on the first day of your period. The Pill will be effective immediately and you do not need to use back-up birth control

Or

1. If you do not begin using the Pill on the first day of your period, you will need to use a non-hormonal back-up method for one full week. Never begin using the Pill if there is any chance of pregnancy.

### You will need to keep taking a pill every day.

Start taking a new package of pills the very next day after you finish a package. Each pack has 28 pills. If you change your mind about taking pills, keep taking them until you talk to your doctor or nurse and they tell you to stop.

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

If you forget to take a pill, take it as soon as you remember it. Then, take the next pill at the time you would normally take it.

### What if I miss 2 or more pills?

1. Call your health care provider. Different pills have different instructions for missed doses. Your health care provider can tell you what to do to get back on track.
2. Use a backup method. Because of the missed pills, you have a greater chance of getting pregnant.

### How do I know if I have a problem from taking pills?

If you have any of these warning signs, call your doctor, nurse or health department clinic right away:

- ▲ Sharp chest pain and/or coughing up blood (possible clot in lung)
- ▲ Pain in the calf (back of lower leg)
- ▲ Crushing chest pain or heaviness
- ▲ Sudden severe headache, change in vision or speech, weakness in one side (possible stroke)
- ▲ Missed menstrual period or irregular vaginal bleeding

### When you take birth control pills, there are a few things you need to do:

- ▲ If you get sick, tell your doctor or nurse you are taking birth control pills.
- ▲ If you have diarrhea or get sick to your stomach, keep taking your pills but use a latex condom each time you have sex until your next period.
- ▲ If taking Rifampicin or anticonvulsants, let your health care provider know.

### Can I breastfeed while taking birth control pills?

Yes, breastfeeding with the pill is safe for you and your baby. It is best to wait until four weeks after you start breastfeeding to start using the pill.

### Where can I get the pill?

Health departments or doctor's offices.

### REMEMBER:

Pills will not keep you from getting HIV or any other disease you can get when you have sex. To protect yourself, use a latex or polyurethane condom each time you have sex.

References: Contraceptive Technology 20<sup>th</sup> ed., (2011), U.S. Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use (2012), U.S. Selected Practice Recommendations for Contraceptive Use (2013)



State of North Carolina • Pat McCrory, Governor  
Department of Health and Human Services • Richard O. Brajer, Secretary  
Division of Public Health  
[www.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.ncdhhs.gov) • [www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dph](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dph)  
NC DHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. 1/2016