

## Starting Birth Control Pills / Combination Oral Contraception

### How do I take the pills?

If starting pills for the first time, you must use a back up birth control method, such as condoms, film, condoms & film or condoms & foam, for 7 days while taking the pills. Take one pill every day until all your pills are gone. **Be sure to take them in order.** Your menstrual period will generally begin during the time you are taking the last 7 pills in the pack. Upon finishing your package of pills, a new pack is started the very next day. Take your pill at the **same time each day**. It is easier to remember to take your pill when it is associated with a regular activity like eating a meal, brushing your teeth, or going to bed. Some women even set an alarm on their phones to keep them on track. Keep your pills in a cool, dry place. Each packet has a stamped expiration date. If you begin the pills prior to that date you can complete that pack of pills until it is finished. **Do not** start a new pack of pills after the expiration date.

If you miss one pill	Take the missed pill as soon as you remember. No backup birth control method such as condoms, or film, are needed.
If you miss two pills in a row	Take the two pills on the day you remember and two pills the next day. Take one pill per day until the pack is finished. Use a backup birth control method such as condoms, foam, or film for seven days after the pills are missed.
If you miss three pills in a row & had unprotected intercourse (UPIC) <u>you may need <b>Emergency Contraception, Plan B. Contact your provider ASAP if you do not have one on hand to take.</b></u>	Take the last pill you missed now and the pill you are supposed to take today. Leave any earlier missed pills & continue taking one pill every day until your pack is finished using abstinence, condoms or film for the next seven days. <b>You may need emergency contraception (Plan B) if you had UPIC during your missed pills. (Contact your provider if you do not have one available to take)</b>

### What are some benefits of taking birth control pills?

- You may expect more regular periods
- Experience less skin problems
- Decreased breast tenderness if you have Fibrocystic breast changes
- You may have shorter, lighter periods
- Less menstrual cramping
- Less Premenstrual symptoms

### What are the most common side effects?

- Most side effects will often resolve after 3 menstrual periods/or 3 cycles.
- Nausea is sometime experienced. This can be reduced by taking your pill at bedtime or with meals.
- Spotting between periods is not a serious problem and will usually stop within 3 menstrual periods. **Do not** stop taking your pills as the contraceptive protection is still present even if you are spotting.
- Breast tenderness from estrogen stimulation will usually stop after 3 menstrual periods.
- Weight gain of 1-8# ( pounds) may occur from fluid retention. This should be self relieving after 3 menstrual periods.
- Headaches
- Depression or irritability; skin changes and extra hair growth

## **When to call the health care provider**

If one or more pills are forgotten and a menstrual period is missed

If spotting between periods, nausea, or breast tenderness persists or increases

If any of these **serious side effects** occur (*ACHES*)

**A:** Abdominal pain (severe)

**C:** Chest pain (severe) or shortness of breath

**H:** Headaches (severe) or dizziness, weakness, or numbness

**E:** Eye problems (vision loss) or blurring, double vision

**S:** Severe leg pain (in calf or thigh)

**Note:** *Smokers who take estrogen containing birth control pills have a higher chance of serious side effects especially those 35 yrs and older*

## **Important things to know when taking birth control pills**

If you have vomiting or diarrhea, use a backup method of birth control (condoms, foam, or film) until your next period starts.

Use a backup method of birth control (condoms, foam, or film) when taking certain types of antibiotics (rifampin, griseofulvin) and be sure to tell your healthcare provider.

If you are taking Valium (diazepam), be sure to tell your healthcare provider that you are also taking birth control pills. The pill causes Valium (diazepam) to remain longer than usual in the body, so your Valium (diazepam) dosage may need to be adjusted.

Over the counter St. John's Wort may decrease the effectiveness of your birth control pill, meaning it may not work. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if you take St. John's Wort.

Birth control pills may decrease your risk of certain types of cervical, endometrial, and ovarian cancer.

There are many different types of birth control pills. Be sure to follow these instructions even if you know people following different ones. **Never** borrow pills from friends.

Like all medications, birth control pills should always be kept out of reach of children.

Our clinicians and public health nurses can be reached at 1-866-960-0633 for additional questions and concerns.