

Birth Control Pill

What is the birth control pill (the pill)?

- The birth control pill is a pill you take daily to prevent pregnancy.
- The pill contains two hormones (estrogen and progestin) that are similar to a woman's natural hormones.

How does the pill work?

- Hormones in the pill stop your ovary from releasing an egg each month, so you cannot get pregnant.
- If you miss pills at any time, you can get pregnant. The greatest risk for pregnancy is when you miss pills at the beginning or end of the pack or are late starting your next pack of pills.

How effective is the pill?

- With typical use, the pill is 92 to 97 per cent effective. With perfect use, the pill can be 99.9 per cent effective.
- Most pregnancies happen because women forget to take their pill daily.

How do I start the pill?

- Contact your birth control clinic or health-care provider to obtain the pill.
- There are different ways to start the first package of pills:
 - If you start the pill on the first day of your period, it works immediately.
 - If you start the pill on day 2 to 5 of your period, use an extra form of birth control (e.g. condoms) for 7 days.

It is very important to start your new pack of pills on time. If your period does not start, begin your new pill pack on time and see your health-care provider.

Side effects of the pill.

There is a small chance (especially in the first 3 months) that you may have:

- spotting or bleeding between periods.
- upset stomach (nausea).
- mild headaches, breast tenderness.
- moodiness and bloating.
- slight weight gain or loss. In most cases, changes in weight are not related to pill use.

If you have any of these side effects talk with your health-care provider. **DO NOT STOP TAKING THE PILL.**

Blood clots

In rare cases, women taking the pill may develop a blood clot. Your risk is higher if:

- you are a smoker
- you have a family history
- you have had a blood clot, heart attack, or stroke

See your doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency room if you have any of these symptoms:

- severe abdominal pain
- severe chest pain or difficulty breathing
- severe headaches or numbness in arms and legs
- eye problems such as blurred vision or loss of vision
- severe leg pain



How do I take the pill?

Take 1 pill each day, as close to the same time as possible, until you finish your pack.

21-day pack

- Take the 21 hormone pills. Take no pills for 7 days. Start the next pill pack after the 7-day pill break. Your period should come during the 7 days you are not taking pills. You continue to be protected from pregnancy during these 7 days.

28-day pack

- Take the 21 hormone pills and 7 hormone-free pills (28 pills). Start a new pack of pills on day 29. Your period should come during the 7 days you are taking the 7 hormone-free pills. You continue to be protected from pregnancy during these 7 days.

Important to remember

- Your period may be more regular, lighter, or shorter with less cramping.
- You can get pregnant as soon as you stop using the pill.
- You can safely 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 (ovarian and endometrial).
- Taking prescription (e.g. some antibiotics or anticonvulsants) or over-the-counter medication (e.g. St. John’s Wort) may decrease the effectiveness of the pill. Check with your pharmacist to see if your medication affects the pill.
- If you vomit within 1 hour of taking the pill, take the next pill in your package.

Sexual decision making

Choose to have sex or not - you have the right to make that decision.

Choose to protect yourself from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STI.

Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.

Missed a Hormone Pill?

For all pills missed by 24 hours or longer

- Use an extra form of birth control (e.g. condoms) for the next 7 days as you may not be protected from pregnancy.
- If you have had unprotected sex during this time, or the extra form of birth control fails (e.g. condom breaks), contact your birth control clinic or health-care provider as you may want to consider emergency contraception, which can prevent pregnancy.

Missed Pill(s) - 1 pill

- Take the missed pill as soon as you remember. Take the next pill at the usual time. This may mean taking 2 pills in 1 day. If you missed it by a full 24 hours, take the 2 pills together.

2 pills during the first 2 weeks

- Take 2 pills on the day you remember and 2 pills the next day. Continue to take 1 pill a day until you finish the pack.

2 pills in the 3rd week or 3 or more pills at any time

- Throw out the remainder of the pack. Start a new pack of pills. You may not get a period this month.

For more information

Contact your physician, local community health centre or birth control clinic:

Calgary:	(403) 944-7111
Edmonton:	(780) 735-0010
Fort McMurray:	(780) 791-6263
Grande Prairie:	(780) 513-7551
Lethbridge:	(403) 320-0110
Red Deer:	(403) 346-8336

Or

Health Link Alberta (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Edmonton, call 408-LINK (5465)

Calgary, call 943-LINK (5465)

Outside the Edmonton and Calgary local calling areas, call toll-free 1-866-408-LINK (5465)

STI/HIV Information Line 1-800-772-2437