



## Taking Oral Contraceptives (“The Pill”)

### How They Work

The hormones in your birth control pill prevent pregnancy by “taking over” the hormones in your body. They prevent the ovary from releasing an egg and thicken the mucous at the entrance of the uterus, blocking sperm from getting in.

### Taking Your Pill

- Start your first pack of pills in one of these three ways, your health care provider will decide which is best for you:
  - **Start your pills the first Sunday after your next period begins, or the first day of your period if your menses begin on a Sunday.**
  - **Start your pills on the first day of your next period.**
  - **Start your pills on the day you are in the doctor’s office.**
- After starting the pill, continue taking one pill every day. There should not be any days when you do not take a pill.
- Your pill pack has two kinds of pills: “active” pills with hormone and “placebo” pills without hormone. You need to take the active pill to prevent pregnancy. They become effective after taking them for seven days. Taking the placebos is the trigger for your period. Most women begin their menses on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the placebo pills.
- After finishing a pack of pills, begin your next pack the very next day, even if you still have your period.
- Breakthrough bleeding (“spotting” or bleeding between your periods) is common and expected in the first 3 months of pill use. **DO NOT** skip or stop your pills. **DO** call our office if you are concerned.
- ***You must always continue to use a condom. The pill does NOT protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV (AIDS).***
- Antibiotics and other medications may decrease the effectiveness of the birth control pill, giving an increased risk of pregnancy or a heavier menses that month. Again, be sure to use a condom!

### What if You Miss an “Active” Pill?

- ***If you are late taking a pill***, take it as soon as you remember it.
- ***If you miss taking a pill for one whole day***, take 2 hormone pills the next day at the regular time.
- ***If you miss 2 pills***, take 2 pills each day for the next 2 days, then finish your pack of pills as usual.
- ***If you miss 3 or more pills***, throw out that pack of pills and start a new pack that same day.

Missing a pill or even just being late taking a pill can result in some bleeding that may or may not resolve during the rest of the pill pack. Missing a pill also increases the risk of pregnancy. Just keep taking them to get back on track.

### **Call Your Doctor Right Away if You Have**

- **A**bdominal pain (severe)
- **C**hest pain (severe)/shortness of breath
- **H**eadaches (severe)
- **E**ye problems – blurred vision or loss of vision
- **S**evere leg pain (calf or thigh)

Women taking the pill have a small increased risk for getting a blood clot in the leg or lung. This risk is very low: about 1 in 15,000 women. If you smoke, this risk increases.

### **Common Side Effects**

Occasionally women starting the pill will have nausea, breast tenderness, headaches or mood changes. If this happens, it is usually mild and does not last long. Birth control pills **do not** cause weight gain.

### **Other Benefits**

- Lighter, less painful, more regular periods
- Decreased acne and less unwanted hair growth
- Fewer ovarian cysts
- Fewer benign (harmless) breast lumps
- Fewer pelvic infections
- Lower risk of ovarian and uterine cancer
- Stronger bones