

BIRTH CONTROL PILL (BCP)

What is it?

Most birth control pills (BCP) or oral contraceptives (OC) contain the hormones estrogen and progesterone and prevents pregnancy by stopping ovulation (release of an egg by the ovary). It is between 92 and 99.7% effective. The pill must be taken at the same time every day.

There are 28 and 21 day pill packs.

- **28 day pill packs** have 21 hormone pills and 7 “fake” pills. Take one pill every day for 28 days. Then start a new pack of pills whether bleeding has stopped or not. (Your period will start during the last 7 “fake” pills.)
- **21 day pill packs** have 21 hormone pills. Take one pill every day for 21 days. Then take no pills for 7 days. (Your period will start during these pill-free days.) Then start a new pack of pills whether bleeding has stopped or not.

When should a back- up method be used with the pill ?

There is a chance of getting pregnant any time you haven’t taken your pills correctly. Use a back-up method of birth control such as condoms or don’t have sex for the next 7 days when:

- a) starting your very first pack of pills.
 - Pills become effective after you have taken the first 7 pills as directed.
- b) any pills are missed or 24 hours late:
 - See back of sheet for instructions on missed pills.
- c) taking prescribed or over-the-counter medications, or street drugs/herbal:
 - Continue to take the pill as usual.
 - Abstain from intercourse or use a back-up method while taking your other medications and for 7 days after you have completed taking the other medications.
- d) vomiting occurs within 1 hour of taking a pill:
 - Take another pill from a separate pack as soon as you feel the vomiting has stopped.
 - If you have severe vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours, keep taking your pills as usual if you are able.
 - Do not have vaginal sex or make sure to use a back-up method while you are ill and for 7 days after you feel better.

If you have made any mistakes taking your birth control pills, you may be able to take the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (Morning After Pill) for up to 3 days after unprotected sex to help prevent pregnancy.

Remember: Use condoms every time to help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI), HIV, and Hepatitis B.

Possible side effects of the pill:

- bleeding between periods (break-through bleeding)
- stomach upset or nausea
- weight gain/bloating due to water retention
- headaches
- sore breasts
- mood changes
- lighter and/or shorter periods, less cramping
- getting drunk faster and staying drunk longer if you use alcohol (wine, beer, liquor)
- a decrease in some vitamin levels, so it is important to eat a well balanced diet and consider taking a multivitamin

If you take birth control pills, it is advised that you not smoke. Women who take the pill and smoke have a slightly higher chance of developing a blood clot.

Signs of a blood clot include:

- severe abdominal or chest pain
- severe cough or shortness of breath
- severe headache
- dizziness
- eye problems such as vision loss or blurring
- speech problems such as slurring
- severe leg pain in calf or thigh
- weakness or numbness, especially if one sided

If you have any of these signs, stop taking the pill and go to a hospital right away.

For more information call
Peel Public Health 905-799-7700
or visit
peelsexualhealth.ca intheknowpeel.ca
peelregion.ca/health