BIRTH CONTROL PILL INFORMATION

Birth control pills provide an effective method of contraception if taken consistently as instructed. They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

WHEN DO I START MY FIRST PACK OF PILLS?

Sunday Start
1. Take the first pill in your pack on the Sunday following the first day of your period (your period may be over or you may be still bleeding).
2. Abstain or use a back-up method of birth control (such as condoms) until you’ve been on the pill for 7 days.

First Day Start
1. Take the first pill in your pack on the day your period begins.
2. A back-up method is not needed.

Quick Start
1. Take the first pill in your pack on the day of your clinic visit OR when recommended by your health care provider, as long as you are not pregnant.
2. Abstain or use a back-up method of birth control (such as condoms) until you’ve been on the pill for 7 days.

WHAT TO DO DURING THE MONTH

Pills are most effective if taken at the same time every day in order to keep a steady level of hormone in your system. If pills are taken at varied times of the day, bleeding or spotting between periods is also possible.

- Always following the package sequence exactly, even if you have some bleeding between periods or don’t have sex often.
- You can expect your period each month sometime during the time you are taking your “inactive” pills. You are protected from pregnancy during the 7 “inactive” pills as long as you start the next pack of pills on time.

PILLS AND YOUR PERIOD

Women taking birth control pills get withdrawal bleeding or break through bleeding they do not get periods. A period is the bleeding that women get 2 weeks after ovulation. Women who take birth control pills consistently do not ovulate, therefore they do not get periods. We call the bleeding while on birth control pills a period but that is not an accurate description.

- Breakthrough Bleeding (BTB) occurs while you are taking the hormone pills. This is a common side effect when starting birth control pills or if you miss some pills. The bleeding can be just brown spotting or like a normal “period”. If you experience BTB continue to take the pills as directed. Spotting or BTB that occurs after the first 3 cycles of pill use may be normal but could be a sign of a more serious problem. Call the clinic if you have concerns about your bleeding pattern.
• **Withdrawal bleeding** occurs when you stop taking the hormone pills or during your time on the inactive pills or “fake pills”. Sometimes this bleeding continues into your next pack of pills.

• Women on birth control pills do not need to get regular (periods) withdrawal bleeds. There are many new ways of taking birth control pills that alter bleeding patterns or eliminate withdrawal bleeding.

**Missed Periods**

While on birth control pills many women find that their withdrawal bleed (“period”) is lighter and shorter. Some women do not get a withdrawal bleed.

• **No Missed pills**: if you have taken you pills consistently and miss a period, you are probably not pregnant. Start your next pack on time, and you may do a pregnancy test and/or call Student Health Service.

• If you have **missed pills** and then missed your period always start you next pack on time on time and then call Student Health Service and/or do a home pregnancy test.

**Missed Pills**

If you miss hormone containing pills you could become pregnant or experience BTB. The more pills you miss the more likely you are to ovulate. If you are taking pills in the traditional 28 pill pack the worst pills to miss are in the beginning of the first week and at the end of the third week.

• **Remember the seven day rule**: Once you have been on the hormone pills for seven days ovulation is prevented. Once you have been off the hormone pills (active pills) for more than seven days your body may be ready to ovulate and a backup method is needed to prevent pregnancy.

• If you **miss one pill** take it as soon as you remember or take two the next day at your regular time.

• If you **miss two pills**, take two one day and two the next day so you are caught up to where you should be. You may need a backup method, remember the **seven day rule**.

• If you **miss three pills**, stop taking this pack and start a new pack of pills on Sunday or your next start day. Use a backup method until you have been back on the hormone pills for seven days.

• Missed pills can cause spotting or breakthrough bleeding, even if you make up the missed pills. Taking more than one birth control pill at a time can cause nausea.

• If you miss any pills you may wish to consider using emergency contraception (ECP) or Plan B. ECP is available at Student Health Service or without a prescription at most pharmacies if you are 18 or older.

• You do not need to make up any missed inactive pills. If you take your pills consistently you are “protected” from pregnancy during the time you are taking the inactive pills.
MINOR SIDE EFFECTS

These side effects may or may not occur and will usually disappear by the end of the first few pill packs. On the other hand, you can experience all these side effects and still stay on the pill safely. The pill will still effectively prevent pregnancy.

- Spotting, breakthrough bleeding, vaginal discharge
- Missed periods
- Nausea
- Acne may get better or worse
- Headaches may get better or worse
- Mood changes
- Changes in sex drive
- Breast tenderness

SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS

In some cases birth control pills have caused blood pressure elevation, benign liver tumors, gall bladder disease, severe migraine headaches with neurological problems (Blurred vision, blind spots, zigzag lines) and an increased risk for blood clots that can lead to stroke, heart attack, pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis. These complications are rare and often associated with age (over 35), smoking cigarettes and hereditary conditions (runs in families).

If you have any of these symptoms, call Student Health Services at 715-836-5360, your doctor, or go to the nearest emergency room.

A: Severe Abdominal Pain
C: Severe chest pain associated with shortness of breath
H: Severe headaches,
E: Eye problems, loss of vision or blurred vision
S: Swelling or severe pain in one leg

ADVANTAGES

Safe, effective and reversible. Ovulation resumes quickly after stopping birth control pills.

Menstrual benefits:
- shorter lighter periods with less blood loss and less cramping.
- Reduces the risk for ovarian and endometrial cancer.
- Suppresses endometriosis and ovarian cysts
- Decreases acne and hirsutism.
- Decreases androgen sensitivity for women with PCOS

VOMITING AND DIARRHEA

If you have diarrhea and/or vomiting, continue to take your birth control pills. Abstain or use a back-up method of birth control (such as condoms) until 7 days after the vomiting and/or diarrhea have stopped.
OTHER MEDICATION USE WHILE ON THE PILL

- Rifampin (a treatment for tuberculosis), certain seizure medications, prolonged use of oral anti-fungals, and St. John’s Wart can reduce the birth control pills effectiveness.
- Conflicting advice exists regarding the impact of antibiotics on the birth control pills effectiveness. A condom as a back-up method is always an option for women who feel less protected during such times.

OTHER PILL POINTERS

1. When you see a clinician for any reason be sure to mention you are on birth control pills. This is particularly important if you are admitted to the hospital or if you plan to have surgery.
2. Read the package insert that comes with your pills.
3. Smoking while using birth control pills increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, and blood clots, especially if you are over age 35. It is recommended that you stop smoking if you are taking the pill.
4. If you are a new birth control pill user, a “3 month” follow-up visit with the nurse is recommended to check your blood pressure and assess for any other problems. It is important to plan ahead to make sure you always have an adequate supply of birth control pills on hand.
5. Condoms are an effective back-up method if you run out or miss pills and for prevention of sexually transmitted diseases/HIV.

FOR REFILLS:

- Call Student Health Service at 715-836-5360
- Access eFill, a web-based prescription refill service available on the Student Health Service website. (www.uwec.edu/shs)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Read the package insert that comes with your pills.
- Visit the website of your pill’s manufacturer.