



What it is

The birth control pill, or the Pill, is one of the most researched and prescribed medications in the world. There are different types of Pills, but all contain small amounts of hormones (estrogen and progesterin or progesterin only). The Pill helps prevent pregnancy, but does not protect against Sexually Transmitted infections (STIs).

How the Pill works

The pill works to prevent pregnancy by:

- stopping ovaries from releasing an egg every month
- thickening the cervical mucus so sperm have a harder time traveling
- making the lining of the uterus thinner so that an egg has a harder time implanting

Advantages

- very effective
- reversible and no delay in fertility once you stop
- shorter and more regular periods and may reduce cramps
- improved acne

Disadvantages

- the Pill does not protect against STIs
- may cause temporary side effects (see section on Side Effects)

Where to get the Pill

You need a prescription to take the Pill, so you will need to visit your doctor. If you are aged 24 or younger you can come to Public Health's Sexual Health Clinic. Cost of the Pill will vary and some health plans will cover the cost.

How to use the Pill

You need to take the pill at the **same time every day**. Decide with your doctor or clinic when is the best day for you to start taking your first pack of pills. Your pills may be a 21-day or 28-day type.

21-Pill Pack

- Take one pill a day for 21 days.
- After 21 days, you will take no pills for seven days. You will have your period during this week.
- After the seven days, begin a new pack of pills on the same day of the week you started the first pack.

28-Pill Pack

- Take one pill a day for 28 days.
- During the last seven pills of this pack you will have your period.
- Begin your new pack of pills the next day after you finish the first pack.

Your health care provider will also tell you to do a Sunday Start, First Day Start, or Quick Start

I. Sunday Start

Take the first pill on the Sunday after your period begins. If you period begins on Sunday, start that day.

II. First Day Start

Start your first pill on the same day that your period begins.

III. Quick Start

Ask your doctor.

If you miss a Pill

If you have missed a Pill by more than two hours, you may be at risk of getting pregnant. Keep taking your pills and use a back-up method of birth control (or stop having sex until you start your next package of pills).

Miss one pill

- Take the missed pill as soon as you remember and the next pill at the usual time. You might take two pills in one day
- Continue to take the rest of the pills in your package
- Use a back-up method of birth control until you start your next package of pills

Miss two pills in a row

- Take two pills as soon as you remember and two pills the next day.
- Then take one pill a day until you finish the pack.
- Remember to use a back-up method of birth control until you start your next package of pills.

Miss three or more pills in a row

- Follow the instructions on your pill pack or call the Sexual Health Clinic for information.

When you will get your period

Traditionally, women take the pill in 28 day cycles during which they take the actual contraceptive for 21 days and a sugar pill or no pill for seven days. This allows them to have their period. In these situations, it is normal for a woman's period to be shorter and lighter than usual. Other women take the Pill continuously and do not have their period at all. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about different options.

Side effects of the Pill

The Pill might cause side effects such as:

- irregular bleeding
- breast tenderness
- nausea
- headaches

These usually go away after a few months. In rare cases when these side effects don't go away, you should see your doctor.

Rare side effects may include: severe pain in the chest, stomach, or legs; shortness of breath; sudden loss or disturbance of vision; severe headaches, yellowing of skin. If you experience any of these, stop taking the Pill and go to the Emergency Room of a hospital near you.

Times when you need to use back-up birth control

It is always a good idea to use condoms with the Pill to avoid sexually transmitted infections (STIs), but you will also need a back-up birth control method in the following situations:

- **When you start your first pack or are restarting.** The Pill does not start to work immediately so use a second method of birth control for at least the first month
- **When you take certain medications (e.g. antibiotics).** Your pharmacist can tell you about a medication and its effect on the pill. Also, when you are seen by a doctor for other problems, be sure to tell them that you are using birth control pills
- **If you have diarrhea for 24 hours or vomit two hours after taking the pill.** Your body will not have had enough time to absorb it and there is a higher chance of getting pregnant. Take your pills at your regular time, but use back-up birth control for the rest of the pack
- **If surgery is planned.** If you are having surgery, tell your doctor that you are on the pill. Some surgery may require you to stop the pill. While off the pill, use another method of birth control

Remember!

- The Pill does NOT protect against Sexually Transmitted Infections.
- Your best protection is to use the Pill with a condom.
- Think ahead. Don't run out of pills.
- When going away for a day or more, remember to take your pills with you.
- When you begin your last pack of pills, phone your clinic or doctor to make an appointment.
- If you miss a period, do not be alarmed. Continue taking your pills and call your family doctor or the clinic for advice.

Sexual Health/Harm Reduction Program

For clinic times call 519-883-2267

All clinical and counselling services are free and confidential. No health card is required to receive services.

Questions?

Call the Region of Waterloo Public Health Sexual Health Program or your doctor.



Scan this code with your smartphone for more information about sexual health clinics and services.

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.

Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Sexual Health/Harm Reduction Program

www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph

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