

Birth Control Pills

What are birth control pills?

The birth control pills, also known as “the pill” or oral contraceptives, contain hormones (chemical substances that control the body’s organs) to prevent pregnancy. Most pills contain 2 hormones – estrogen and progesterone.

How do they work?

The combination of hormones prevents ovulation (which is the release of an egg during the monthly cycle). A woman cannot get pregnant if she does not ovulate because there is no egg to be fertilized. The pill also changes the mucus around the cervix (the opening into the uterus or womb), which makes it difficult for the sperm to enter the uterus.

What are some of the benefits of the pill?

The pill usually makes periods lighter, regular, reduces cramps and often improves acne. Pills can also protect against some kinds of cancer, breast disease, anemia, ovarian cysts and cancer of the lining of the uterus. After a while, some women will not have any period at all. This is normal if she has not missed any pills.

What are possible side effects of the pill?

Some women can get headaches, breast tenderness, irregular bleeding. Sometimes these side effects will go away after the first 3 months. Most women **will not gain weight** on the pill. Blood clots are rare in women younger than 35 years old who do not smoke; however, **call if you have a severe headache, vomiting, crushing chest pain, shortness of breath or pain and swelling of a leg.**

Is there anyone who should not take the pill?

Women who have had blood clots, certain kinds of migraines and other medical conditions, unexplained vaginal bleeding, think they maybe pregnant or are older than 35 who smoke should not take the pill.

How should the pill be taken?

The pill should be taken at the same time every day. If you miss a pill, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss more than one pill in a row, you will not be protected from pregnancy and you should use condoms. If the pill is taken late, there will be vaginal bleeding- which is normal. If you are sick and have diarrhea or vomiting the pill may not be effective and you should use condoms as a backup method. If you have not taken your pills as directed and you miss a period, or if you have taken pills as directed and miss two periods, call the clinic and use condoms until you get a pregnancy test. It is helpful to keep a calendar to record your periods.

Does the pill protect a woman from STD’s?

No, the pill **does not protect** a woman from STD’s. To prevent infections and diseases, always use a condom.