

The Pill

What is the Pill?

The "pill" is an oral means of contraception that is over 99% effective when taken properly. It is one of the most effective reversible methods of birth control available. Most pills contain a combination of estrogen and progesterone, the two main female hormones. Modern pills have very low doses of these hormones and cause very few, if any, side effects.

**NOTE: THE PILL DOES NOT PROTECT A WOMAN FROM STDs OR HIV.
CONDOMS MUST BE USED TO HELP PROTECT AGAINST THESE.**

How does the pill work?

The hormones in the pill cause small changes in the body that prevent pregnancy by several different mechanisms:

- Prevents the ovaries from releasing eggs
- The cervical mucus thickens and inhibits the sperm from being able to pass through the cervix into the uterus and fallopian tubes
- The lining of the uterus does not develop enough for a fertilized egg to implant and start a pregnancy

NOTE: ALL OF THESE CHANGES QUICKLY RETURN TO NORMAL AFTER THE PILL IS STOPPED.

Is it safe?

Unfortunately, many women are reluctant to use the pill because they think that it is dangerous or causes cancer. The pill has been studied for over 40 years and the truth is, for most women, the pill is very safe. Studies have shown that for almost all women, the pill carries fewer risks than pregnancy and childbirth.

Studies have also shown that regular pill use offers a number of health benefits. In fact some women take the pill just to experience these benefits. Among these are:

- Regular periods
- Lighter periods that last fewer days
- Less pain and fewer cramps during periods
- Less iron deficiency anemia (low blood count)
- Fewer infections of the upper reproductive tract (uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries)
- Fewer ovarian cysts
- Fewer ectopic pregnancies (pregnancies outside of the uterus)
- Fewer noncancerous breast lumps and cysts
- Reduced risk of ovarian cancer and endometrial (lining of the uterus) cancer
- Possible protection from osteoporosis (brittle bones)

Can anyone take the pill?

Although the pill is very safe for most women, those who have the following medical conditions should not take the pill:

- History of heart attack, stroke, or spontaneous blood clots
- Known or suspected cancer of the breast or endometrium
- Undiagnosed abnormal vaginal bleeding known or suspected pregnancy active liver disease

NOTE: WOMEN WHO HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, MIGRAINE HEADACHES, DIABETES, AND WOMEN OVER 35 WHO SMOKE SHOULD TALK WITH THEIR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER TO DECIDE IF THEY CAN SAFELY TAKE THE PILL.

Warning Signs

Serious side effects from the pill are very rare. However, if you develop any of the following symptoms while on the pill, you should call your health care provider right away. Remember the word "ACHES." It stands for:

A	Abdominal pain (severe)
C	Chest pains, coughing up blood
H	Headaches (severe)
E	Eye problems (blurred or loss of vision)
S	Severe leg pain, numbness or tingling

Possible, minor side effects

Most women do not experience side effects while taking the pill. For those women that do experience side effects, they are usually temporary and disappear over two to three months. Discuss ongoing side effects you think may be linked to pill use with your health care provider. Sometimes, it is possible to eliminate minor side effects by changing to a different pill.

The most common side effects are:

- Nausea*
- Weight gain or loss (3 to 4 lb.)**
- Headaches
- Depression or mood changes
- Breast tenderness
- Dark spots on the skin
- Spotting (breakthrough bleeding)

** Avoid nausea by taking the pill with food or just before bedtime.*

***Most weight gain is due to water retention. Cutting down on salt and adding vitamins E and B6 can often alleviate this problem. Check with your health care provider.*

How do I take the pill?

1. Start the pill on the first Sunday after you begin your period (if your period starts on Sunday, start taking the pill that day) or as directed by your health care provider.
2. Take one pill every day until all the pills in the pack are gone.
3. Try to pick a time that is convenient and easy to remember so that the pill is taken at about the same time each day (within a few hours).
4. When the pack is empty, discard it and start a new pack on the following day.

Periods

The last seven pills in each pack are "placebo" pills and contain no hormones. You will get your period at some point during the week that you are taking these pills. Remember, women who are taking the pill often have light periods, just spotting, or sometimes, no period at all.

WHAT IF I MISS MY PERIOD?

- If you skipped one or more pills during your pack, contact your healthcare provider or come to the clinic for a pregnancy test.
- If you did not skip any pills, remember that it is not unusual to miss periods or have very light periods, especially with today's low-dose pills.
- If you miss two consecutive periods, or are worried that you may be pregnant, contact your health care provider or call the clinic to schedule a pregnancy test.

Pregnancy protection

Although you are probably protected during your first month of taking the pill, it is strongly recommended that you either:
ABSTAIN FROM INTERCOURSE

or

USE A BACK-UP METHOD OF BIRTH CONTROL UNTIL YOU START YOUR SECOND PACK OF PILLS

Spermicidal foam and a condom used together, or diaphragms used with spermicidal cream or jelly are excellent methods. Ask your health care provider.

REMEMBER: THE PILL DOES NOT PROTECT YOU FROM STDs OR HIV

What if I skip a pill?

TRY NOT TO SKIP PILLS!

IF YOU'RE THE TYPE THAT CAN'T REMEMBER TO TAKE A PILL EVERY DAY, YOU SHOULD PROBABLY CHOOSE ANOTHER METHOD OF BIRTH CONTROL. TALK WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER.

If you are generally a good pill taker, but because of some special circumstance you forget to take a pill at the usual time, take it as soon as possible. If you have missed a pill(s):

IF THERE WAS **UNPROTECTED INTERCOURSE** (I.E. NO CONDOM, BARRIER METHOD) IN THE LAST 5 DAYS FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW:

1. Use emergency contraception now!
2. Restart your pills the next day to finish the pack
3. If more than 4 pills were missed, skip the placebo/sugar pills at the end of the pack and then start a new pack immediately
4. Use a back-up method (i.e. condom) for 7 days

IF **NO INTERCOURSE** WITHIN THE LAST 5 DAYS FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW:

1. Take 2 regular pills immediately
2. Restart your pills the next day to finish the pack
3. If more than 4 pills were missed, skip the placebo/sugar pills at the end of the pack and start a new pack immediately
4. Use a back-up method (i.e. condom) for 7 days

What about taking “breaks”?

Many women have heard that taking the pill for long periods of time may be harmful to their health. Actually, there is no medical evidence that taking breaks from the pill is of any benefit. In fact, interruptions diminish some of the health benefits of the pill. In addition, there is the obvious increased risk of pregnancy.

It is probably safe for the vast majority of women to take the pill continuously until age 50, only taking breaks for childbearing purposes. Studies have shown that taking the pill will not affect your future fertility. If you would like to stop taking the pill in order to get pregnant, it is generally recommended to use an alternative method of birth control for three months before trying to conceive. This allows your body to return to its normal fertility cycle. Talk with your health care provider about alternative birth control methods.

REMEMBER, IT IS POSSIBLE TO GET PREGNANT AS SOON AS YOU STOP TAKING PILLS.

What about the Pill and other drugs?

The pill has been found to interact with certain epilepsy and tuberculosis drugs. If this applies to you, talk with your health care provider. Most other drugs including antibiotics can be taken without having to worry about the pill becoming less effective.

What else do I need to know?

1. KNOW THE NAME OF THE PILL YOU ARE TAKING!
2. WHENEVER YOU ARE TREATED FOR ANY MEDICAL CONDITION, TELL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER THAT YOU ARE TAKING THE PILL.
3. IF YOU THINK YOU MAY BE PREGNANT, DO NOT STOP TAKING YOUR PILLS. CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER OR COME INTO THE CLINIC FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.
4. ALWAYS HAVE AN ALTERNATE BIRTH CONTROL METHOD AVAILABLE IN CASE YOU SKIP PILLS, LOSE YOUR PILLS ETC.
5. ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ABOUT ALTERNATE BIRTH CONTROL METHODS AS WELL AS EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVE PILLS (ECPS).
6. PLAN AHEAD. ARRANGE TO GET A NEW PILL PRESCRIPTION WELL BEFORE YOU START YOUR LAST PACK OF PILLS.
7. ALWAYS HAVE AN EXTRA PACK AVAILABLE.
8. CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER WITH ANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS THAT ARE BOTHERING YOU. THE ONLY "DUMB" QUESTIONS ARE THE ONES THAT PUZZLE YOU AND THAT YOU DON'T ASK.

For More Information:

Student Health Services619-594-5281 Facebook/Twitter.....Facebook.com/aztehealth &
Health Promotion.....619-594-4133 @AZTEHealth
Visit Our Website at shs.sdsu.edu Emergency Contraceptive Hotline..... 1-888-NOT-2-LATE