

## What are oral contraceptive pills?

Oral contraceptive pills (OCPs) are medicines that have the female hormones estrogen and progesterone. They are often used to prevent pregnancy but can be used for other reasons.

## Why would I take OCPs?

If taken as instructed, OCPs can help:

- prevent most pregnancies.
- balance out (regulate) women's periods (menstrual cycles). Periods will not be as heavy or irregular.
- reduce menstrual cramps.
- treat or lessen amount of acne.
- reduce excess hair in unwanted places like the face, back, or belly. This will not make unwanted hair go away but it may help keep new hair from forming.
- lessen symptoms of Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS).
- lower your chances of getting cancer of the uterus or ovary.

**OCPs do not prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs).** If you are having sex, you should always use latex or polyurethane condoms to lower the chance of getting infected. This includes HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

## When should I start taking OCPs?

Your healthcare provider will tell you when to start taking this medicine. Once you start taking the OCP, you **must** use a condom or not have sex (abstain) for at least 7 days, or you could become pregnant.

## How should I take OCPs?

Your healthcare provider will tell you if there are any special instructions.

- Most often, you will swallow one pill at the same time every day until the pack is empty. You will then start with a new pack the next day. Keep taking the pills even when you have your period.
- It is most important to find a time that works for you. Set an alarm in your phone to help you remember.
- If you take a pill late or miss pills they do not work as well. You may:
  - get extra periods or bleeding.
  - get pregnant. This is a risk if not using condoms every time or if a condom breaks.
- If you are worried you did not take your pill correctly, use a condom or do not have sex until you have been taking the pill every day for 7 days in a row.
- If you miss a pill and have unprotected sex, call your health care provider right away to see if you need to take emergency contraception (EC).

## Missing a single pill

- If you miss 1 pill from anywhere in the packet, take the missed pill as soon as possible. You may take 2 pills on the same day. Take the next pill on the next day at the normal time.

- Emergency contraception may be needed if other pills were missed earlier in the pack or in the last week of the previous pack.

### Missing two or more pills

If two or more pills in a row are missed:

- Use back-up contraception for 7 days.
- Call your provider or pharmacist for directions on how to restart the pills.

### What are the side effects of OCPs?

- Upset stomach (nausea) and vomiting.
- Mild headaches.
- Sore breasts.
- Vaginal spotting or bleeding.
- Mood changes.

Side effects may lessen after the first few periods. Some women have less symptoms if they take the pills between 6 and 8 pm. Your healthcare provider may suggest other ways to help you have less side effects.

### What are the risks of taking of OCPs?

Taking OCPs increases the risk of blood clots, heart attacks and other serious side effects. Smoking while using OCPs greatly increases those risks. If you have any of these side effects, **call 911 or go to the emergency room immediately!**

Remember **ACHES**:

- **A**bdominal (stomach) pain, severe.
- **C**hest pain, shortness of breath, racing heart, cough.
- **H**eadache (severe), dizziness, speech problems, weakness or numbness.
- **E**ye problems: loss of vision or double vision, or other vision concerns.
- **S**welling, pain or redness of leg (calf or thigh). Can happen in arm, but is very rare.

### Website resources:

<https://bit.ly/2xpMvmJ> Uses for birth control

<https://bit.ly/2l7jH3a> Missed pill chart

**ALERT:** Call your health care provider, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if you:

- Are bleeding longer than 7 days or spotting more than 10 days.
- Are soaking more than one pad or tampon per hour.
- Have special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**