

The Combined Pill

What is combined hormonal birth control?

Combined hormonal birth control uses two types of hormones to prevent pregnancy. They are called estrogen and progestin. They work by:

- stopping the release of an egg (ovulation),
- thickening the cervical fluid to keep sperm from reaching the egg, and
- changing the lining of the uterus.



What products are available?

There are three types of combined hormonal birth control:

- Pills (several brands)
- Skin patch (Evra™)
- Vaginal ring (Haloette™)

How effective is the pill?

- The pill is 93% effective at preventing pregnancy when used correctly.
- Some medications including herbal supplements can interfere with hormonal birth control. Talk to your healthcare provider.

Advantages

- Lighter and regular periods
- Less period cramping
- Sometimes helps with acne
- Can be used to shorten or skip periods
- Lowers risk of ovarian and uterine cancers

Disadvantages

- Have to take a pill every day at the same time
- Not indicated for women over 35 who smoke
- Does not protect from sexually transmitted infections
- Some users may experience mild side effects

Side effects

Some people have side effects which usually go away a few weeks after starting the medication:

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Sore breasts
- Mood changes
- Spotting
(bleeding between periods)
- Skin changes

If you experience side effects and they bother you, go to a clinic or pharmacy to talk about other options **before** you stop using the pill.

WARNING

Reasons to get urgent medical help:

- Frequent or very bad headaches
- Severe pain in your stomach
- Severe leg pain
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Sudden change in seeing or speaking clearly

Birth control is free for BC residents with MSP. For more information, check out the BC Pharmacare website.

Where can you get the pill?

- The pill is available only by prescription and is free if you have MSP.
- Sexual health clinics, pharmacies or your health care provider can provide a prescription for you.
- Some clinics may offer the pill for low or no cost if you don't have MSP.

The birth control pill DOES NOT provide protection from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

STI testing is recommended every 6-12 months and/or when you have a new partner(s).
STI testing is available at a sexual health clinic or with your health care provider.

How is the pill used?

- Start taking the pill right away (or on the first day of your next period).
- Take one pill every day at the same time. Take all of the pills in the pack in the order they are in.

Taking pills on time & never going longer than 7 days without a hormonal pill provides protection from pregnancy for the entire month.

28-day pack:

- Take all the pills in the pack. You will have a period during the last 7 pills of the pack (this is the hormone free week). Start a new 28-day pack immediately (next day) after finishing the last pack.

21-day pack:

- Take all the pills in the pack. At the end of the pack stop taking pills for no more than 7 days, then start a new pack. This is your hormone free week. You will get your period during this time.

The pill is effective in preventing pregnancy after 7 days of use.

Use condoms as back-up for the first seven days.

What to do for late or missed pills?

Pregnancy may occur if birth control is not used properly when sexually active.

Late or missed pill less than 24 hours

- Take one pill when you remember and keep taking your pills as normal.
- You may be taking 2 pills on the same day: 1 when you remember and the other at your usual time.
- You are considered protected from pregnancy.

Late or missed pill more than 24 hours

You may not be protected from pregnancy.

- Keep taking your pills as normal.
- *Use a back-up method of birth control (e.g. condoms) or do not have sex for 7 days until you've had 7 hormonal pills in a row.*
- *Take the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) if you have had sex in the last 5 days.*
- *An IUD can also be used as an option for Emergency Contraception up to 7 days after unprotected sex with effectiveness of 99%.*
- *Call a sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE for more information.*

Check out “*Stay on Schedule: Your guide to taking contraception after a missed or late dose*” at www.sexandu.ca/sos/

Questions?

If you have questions about your birth control, do not stop taking it.

Call your health care provider, sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE



Find the clinic closest to you:

<https://www.vch.ca/en/service/sexual-health-clinics>

www.optionsforsexualhealth.org

This fact sheet contains general information and should not be used in place of individual consultation with a qualified healthcare provider.