

## HOW TO USE THE COMBINED BIRTH CONTROL PILL

### (Containing both Estrogen and Progestogen)

#### Important Points to Remember before You Start Taking Your Pills:

1. Be sure to read these directions
  - before you start taking your pills or
  - anytime you are not sure what to do.
2. The right way to take the pill is to take one pill every day at the same time.
  - If you miss pills, you could get pregnant. This includes starting the pack late.
  - The more pills you miss, the more likely you are to get pregnant.
3. Many women have spotting or light bleeding, or may feel sick to their stomach, during the first one to three packs of pills.
  - If you do feel sick to your stomach (nausea), do not stop taking the pill. The problem will usually go away. If it doesn't go away, check with your health care provider or clinic.
  - If you have spotting or light bleeding between periods, keep track of which days this happens. The problem will usually go away by the end of the third pack of pills. If this occurs after the first three packs of pills, check with your health care provider or clinic.
4. Missing pills can also cause spotting or light bleeding, even when you make up these missed pills.
  - On the days you take two pills to make up for missed pills, you could also feel a little sick to your stomach.
5. If you have vomiting or diarrhea, for any reason, or if you take some medicines, including some antibiotics and herbal supplements (such as St. John's Wart), your pills may not work as well.
  - Use a backup method, such as condoms or vaginal spermicide (foam, film, or suppositories), until you check with your health care provider or clinic. Whenever you see a health care provider, tell them that you are taking birth control pills. (If you are worried about other people finding out that you are taking birth control pills, talk to the health care provider about this.)
6. If you have trouble remembering to take the pill,
  - talk to your health care provider or clinic about how to make pill taking easier or about using another method of birth control.
7. If you have any questions or are unsure about the information on this sheet,
  - call your health care provider or clinic.
8. To avoid running out of pills, call your health care provider or clinic
  - while you are taking your next to the last pack of pills or
  - when you start your last pack of pills.

#### Before You Start Taking Your Pills:

1. Decide what time of day you want to take your pill.
  - It is important to take it at about the same time every day.
2. Look at your pill pack to see if it has 21 or 28 pills.

- The 21-pill pack has 21 "active" pills (with hormones) to take for 3 weeks. No pills are taken during the next week (the 4th week).
- The 28-pill pack has 21 "active" pills (with hormones) to take for 3 weeks, followed by 7 "reminder" pills (without hormones) to take for 1 week (the 4th week).

3. Also find

- where on the pack to start taking pills,
- in what order to take the pills (follow the arrows), and
- the week numbers.

4. Be sure you have ready at all times

- another kind of birth control, such as condoms or vaginal spermicide (foam, film, or suppositories), to use as a backup in case you miss pills, and
- an extra, full pill pack.

When to Start the First Pack of Pills:

You have a choice for which day to start taking your first pack of pills. Decide with your health care provider or clinic which is the best day for you. Pick a time of day that will be easy to remember.

Day 1 Start:

1. Take the first "active" pill of the first pack during the first 24 hours of your period.
2. You will not need to use a backup method of birth control, since you are starting the pill at the beginning of your period.

Sunday Start:

1. Take the first "active" pill of the first pack on the Sunday after your period starts, even if you are still bleeding. If your period begins on Sunday, start the pack that same day.
2. Use another method of birth control as a backup method if you have sex any time from the Sunday you start your first pack until the next Sunday (7 days). Condoms or vaginal spermicide (foam, film, or suppositories) are good backup methods of birth control.

What to Do during the Month:

1. Take one pill at the same time every day until the pack is empty.
  - Do not skip pills even if you are spotting or bleeding between monthly periods or feel sick to your stomach (nausea).
  - Do not skip pills even if you do not have sex very often.

2. When you finish a pack of pills:

(Whether you are continuing with the same pill or switching your brand of pills.)

- 21-pill packs: Wait 7 days to start the next pack. You will probably have your period during that week. Be sure that no more than 7 days pass between 21-day packs.
- 28-pill packs: Start the next pack on the day after your last "reminder" pill. Do not wait any days between packs.

What to Do If You Miss Pills:

à If you miss one "active" pill:

1. Take it as soon as you remember. Take the next pill at your regular time. This means you take two pills in 1 day.
2. You do not need to use a backup birth control method if you have sex.

à If you miss two "active" pills in a row in week 1 or week 2 of your pack:

1. Take two pills on the day you remember and two pills the next day.
2. Then take one pill a day until you finish the pack.
3. You may become pregnant if you had sex during the days that you missed pills or during the first 7 days after you restarted taking pills. You must use another birth control method, such as condoms or vaginal spermicide (foam, film, or suppositories), as a backup for those 7 days.

à If you miss two "active" pills in a row in week 3 of your pack:

1. If you are a day 1 starter: Throw out the rest of the pill pack and start a new pack that same day.  
If you are a Sunday starter: Keep taking one pill every day until Sunday. On Sunday, throw out the rest of the pack and start a new pack of pills that same day.
2. You may not have your period this month, but this is expected. However, if you miss your period 2 months in a row, call your health care provider or clinic because you might be pregnant.
3. You may become pregnant if you had sex during the days that you missed pills or during the first 7 days after you restarted taking pills. You must use another birth control method, such as condoms or vaginal spermicide (foam, film, or suppositories), as a backup for those 7 days.

à If you miss 3 or more "active" pills in a row (during the first 3 weeks):

1. If you are a day 1 starter: Throw out the rest of the pill pack and start a new pack that same day.  
If you are a Sunday starter: Keep taking 1 pill every day until Sunday. On Sunday, throw out the rest of the pack and start a new pack of pills that same day.
2. You may not have your period this month, but this is expected. However, if you miss your period 2 months in a row, call your health care provider or clinic because you might be pregnant.
3. You may become pregnant if you had sex during the days that you missed pills or during the first 7 days after you restarted taking pills. You must use another birth control method, such as condoms or vaginal spermicide (foam, film, or suppositories), as a backup for those 7 days.

A Reminder for Those on 28-Day Packs:

à If you forget any of the seven "reminder" pills in week 4:

- Throw away the pills you missed.
- Keep taking one pill each day until the pack is empty.
- You do not need a backup method.

"Fail-Safe" Instructions:

à Finally, if you are still not sure what to do about the pills you have missed:

1. Use a backup method any time you have sex.
2. Keep taking one "active" pill each day until you can reach your health care provider or clinic.

What to Do if You Miss Your Period:

à If you miss one period and you took all of your pills on time during that pack:

1. Start your next pack as usual.

à If you miss one period and you forgot to take any of the "active" pills during that pack:

1. Start your next pack as usual.
2. Call your health care provider or clinic right away so that a pregnancy test can be done. You may be pregnant.
3. If you are pregnant, you should stop taking your pills.
4. If you are not pregnant, you may continue taking your pills.

à If you miss two periods in a row, even if you took all of the pills on time:

1. Start your next pack as usual.
2. Call your health care provider or clinic right away so that a pregnancy test can be done. Even though birth control pills are very effective when taken correctly, they are not 100% effective. Therefore, you might be pregnant.
3. If you are pregnant, you should stop taking your pills.
4. If you are not pregnant, you may continue taking your pills. However, the type of pill you are taking may need to be changed so that you do not miss periods.

Remember the danger signs that could be warnings of serious pill problems. If they occur, call your health care provider or clinic immediately! (If you cannot reach your health care provider or the clinic, go to your local hospital's Emergency Department.)

Danger Signs: ACHES

Abdominal (Belly) Pain

Chest Pain

Headaches

Eye Problems

Swelling or Pain in Leg or Arm

Remember that birth control pills do not provide protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. In order to reduce your risk of getting STDs, you must practice "safer-sex"--for example, using condoms in addition to taking birth control pills.