

Flathead Family Planning  
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Information for Combined Oral Contraceptive

The combined pills contain both estrogen and progesterone. About seven in one hundred women may become pregnant while using combined oral contraceptives.

**BENEFITS:**

- \* Fewer menstrual cramps and bleeding
- \* Regular periods
- \* Less pain at ovulation
- \* Improvement in acne

**DECREASED RISK OF:**

- \* Reduced PMS symptoms
- \* Ovarian or Endometrial cancer
- \* Benign breast tumors or ovarian cysts
- \* Ectopic pregnancy
- \* Anemia

**SIDE EFFECTS:** While using the pill, you may have the following side effects:

- \* Spotting between periods
- \* Weight changes (uncommon)
- \* Decreased milk supply (breastfeeding)
- \* Cardiovascular Complications (including elevated blood pressure)
- \* Nausea
- \* Breast tenderness
- \* Headaches
- \* Change in libido
- \* Mood changes/depression
- \* Worse acne

**RISKS:** Even though birth control pills are very safe, using the combination pill can slightly increase your risk of health problems. Complications aren't common, but can be serious. These include:

- \* Heart Attack
- \* Stroke
- \* Blood Clots
- \* Liver Tumors

In very rare cases, they can lead to death. When talking to your health care provider about birth control, tell them about any medications you're taking and any health problems you've had.

To decrease your chances of serious problems, you need to go to an emergency room, doctor, or clinic if you have any of the following symptoms:

**PILL DANGER SIGNS**

- A** Abdominal pain (severe)
- C** Chest pain or shortness of breath
- H** Headaches (severe)
- E** Eye problems -- blurred vision, flashing lights, or blindness
- S** Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

**ALTERNATIVES:** You may receive information about the other methods of birth control that are available. For situations of suspected contraception failure, emergency contraception is available and offers a second chance to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** You have received this information sheet about the birth control pill and how to use it. The pill does not protect against STIs (sexually transmitted infections) or HIV.

**DECISION TO STOP TAKING PILLS:** You may stop taking birth control pills at any time. A woman is most likely to become pregnant if she or her partner does not use a method of birth control.

**QUESTIONS:** You may ask questions about birth control pills at any time and may contact the clinic with further questions.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING COMBINED ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE (BIRTH CONTROL PILLS)

1. There are three satisfactory ways to start taking your birth control pills. You should discuss with your provider which approach is right for you.
  - Start on the first day of menstrual bleeding.
  - Start on the first Sunday after your period begins.
  - Start today if you are certain that you are not pregnant.
2. Swallow one pill every day until you finish the pack.
  - If you are using a 21-day pack, stop one week and then start a new pack.
  - If you are using a 28-day pack, begin a new pack immediately. Skip no days between packages.
  - Continuous or extended oral contraceptive are safe and effective methods of skipping or stopping your menstrual cycle. The benefits may include avoiding monthly bleeding and associated side effects such as headaches, cramps, and PMS symptoms.

### Instructions for taking hormonal birth control continuously:

- Take one hormone containing (active) pill at approximately the same time EVERY day. Do not take any of the placebo (inactive) pills. We recommend that you punch out and throw away the inactive pills at the end of the pack so you won't take them by mistake.
- When you have taken all of the active pills in the pack, start a new pack the next day. Do not take a break.
- If you have bleeding that requires a tampon or pad that occurs for 2 days, or if you have spotting lasting for at least 4 days, stop taking the active pills for 3 DAYS only. (You can either punch out and throw away those pills, or just stop the pills and relabel your pack with a new day strip to the correct day of the week). Taking a 3-day break from the pills will allow the lining of the uterus to be shed, so be prepared to have bleeding when you stop the pills. Even if you are still bleeding, restart your pills after the 3-day break.

### Guidelines for taking hormonal birth control continuously:

- Never take more than a **3-day break** from your pills.
- Don't take a break unless you have bleeding for 2 days or spotting for 4 days.
- You must always take at least **3 weeks** of active pills before taking a 3-day break.

But, there is no maximum amount of weeks or months that you can take your pills continuously. If you are not having any bleeding or spotting, then you do not need to take a 3-day break. Many patients find that they can eventually take months of pills continuously with no bleeding, but at first many will experience bleeding every few weeks which requires a 3-day break to resolve. Just remember, you must always take at least **3 weeks** of active pills before taking a 3-day break.

3. Try to associate taking your pill with some regularly scheduled activity like going to bed, eating a meal or brushing your teeth. This may make it easier to remember. Pills work best if you take one about the same time every day in order to keep the proper amount of medication in your system. This is especially important if you have bleeding between your periods.
4. If you miss no pills and skip a period, pregnancy is unlikely. It is common for women taking birth control pills to miss periods occasionally. If you are worried or have symptoms of pregnancy, call the clinic. Otherwise, start a new package of pills at the regular scheduled time. (See # 7 below).
5. Check your pack of birth control pills every morning to make sure you took your pill the day before.
  - If you miss one pill, take the late or missed pill as soon as possible. Continue taking the remaining pills at the usual time (even if it means taking two pills on the same day). You probably will not get pregnant but you may want to use a backup method or avoid sexual intercourse for seven days after the missed pill.
  - If you miss two or more pills in a row, take the most recent missed pill as soon as possible (any other missed pills should be discarded). Continue taking the remaining pills at the usual time (even if it means taking two pills on the same day). Use a backup method or avoid sexual intercourse until hormonal pills have been taken for 7 days in a row. If pills were missed in the last week of hormonal pills (e.g., days 15-21 for 28-day pill pack):
    - Omit the hormone-free interval by finishing the hormonal pills in the current pack and starting a new pack the next day.
    - If unable to start a new pack immediately, use a backup method or avoid sexual intercourse until hormonal pills have been taken for 7 days in a row.
  - **Emergency contraception is available if you were sexually active any of the days you missed pills.**
  - If the pills you miss are from the fourth week of a 28-day pack, throw away the missed pills. Continue taking pills from your current package of pills on schedule. The pills in this fourth week do not contain hormones, so this does

- not increase your risk of pregnancy.
- If you miss one or more pills and miss a period, you should stop taking pills and contact your Family Planning clinic or health-care provider for a pregnancy test. You may want to consider using another method of birth control.
6. A backup method may not be necessary if you started the pills on the first day of bleeding. For a Sunday start, use another method of birth control as a backup method for the next seven days. Keep a backup method handy all the time.
  7. If you miss two periods, come to the clinic for a pregnancy test, even if you have taken your pills every day right on schedule.
  8. If you become ill and have several days of diarrhea or vomiting, use a backup means of birth control for the remainder of that cycle (until next menstrual period starts). Start a new pack of pills with the next menstrual period.
  9. It is not uncommon for women to have some spotting when they first start to use the pill. If the bleeding is heavy or occurs for two or more cycles, call the clinic.
  10. You may discontinue use of the pill at any time if you decide you want to become pregnant. Contact the clinic for preconception information and prenatal care options in your area.
  11. When you are seen by a health-care provider for other problems, or are admitted to a hospital, be sure to mention that you are using birth control pills.
  12. Antacids, vitamin C, some prescribed medications (anti-seizure medications) and some herbal supplements (St. John's Wort) may interfere with the efficiency of either the oral contraceptives or that particular medication. Consult your family planning clinic or other health-care provider before taking other medications.
  13. You may be given an extensive pamphlet about your birth control pill to read. The pamphlet is produced by your birth control pill manufacturer. Read the whole pamphlet carefully.
  14. It is your responsibility to learn the side effects of the pill and the pill danger signs (listed on the first page). Do not ignore these problems or wait to see if they go away. Call the Family Planning clinic or your health-care provider immediately and explain your problem. Note that the first letter of the pill danger signals spells out the word ACHES.