

HEALTH MATTERS

Using Birth Control Pills Regularly for Successful Contraception

Consistency = Confidence

The pill is very convenient and effective and provides health benefits that reach far beyond pregnancy prevention. Millions of women take it with confidence — and rightly so.

But to be fully effective, birth control pills need to be taken correctly. Missing even a few doses greatly increases your chances of pregnancy: while only 0.1 percent of women get pregnant when using the pill properly, pregnancy rates soar by 30-80 times when pills are missed.

This information can help you set — and stick to — a routine that's right for you.

Skipping Pills Greatly Increases the Chance of Pregnancy

Your life. Your routine.

Given how important it is to take your pills regularly, it's essential that you establish a routine that works for you. Does it fit your schedule? Are you more likely to remember your pill in the morning or at night? How will you remind yourself?

It's best if you take your pill at the same time every day. Try to make it part of something you do already, like taking vitamins in the morning or brushing your teeth before bed. If that doesn't suit you, how about right after dinner or with your first cup of coffee? Be it morning, noon or night, taking your pills at a consistent time is the quickest way to develop a new routine.

Three more good ideas:

Pack your pills. Even if you take them at home or work, carry your pills with you at all times. That way, you'll have them on hand if you're suddenly called away or realize that you forgot to take one.

Mark your calendar. Try to pick up your pill packs on the same day every month, and then mark your calendar. Many women pick up their packs every two months, on the first day of the month.

The 3-month rule. If you're new to the pill, be sure to call or visit your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider after three months for a quick checkup. It's a great chance to discuss your experience and any questions you might have.

FIND THE ROUTINE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU. AND STICK WITH IT!

If you miss a pill...

Never skip a pill on purpose — even if you bleed between periods, miss a period, get headaches or feel queasy. All of these are normal side effects which some women experience and which usually disappear after three menstrual cycles. (If you're concerned, or the symptoms are severe, call your health care provider.)

As for skipping a pill by accident... We all slip up now and then, and it's likely that you'll eventually forget to take a pill. If you miss just one, don't worry — take it as soon as you remember and take the next pill at your regular time.*

If you miss two or more pills, you must do two things:

Call your doctor. Different pills have different instructions for missed doses. Your health care provider can tell you what to do to get back on track.

Use a back-up. Because of the missed pills, you have a much greater chance of getting pregnant. So even though you're back on schedule, you also need to use a back-up method of contraception — like a condom, or spermicide — for the rest of your cycle.

Also use a back up method when:

Your cycle requires it. If your period begins on a day other than Sunday just before you begin taking a Sunday-start pill, you should use a back-up method for the next seven days.

You are vomiting or have diarrhea. They can interfere with your body's absorption of the pill,

and raise your chance of pregnancy. Use a back-up for the rest your cycle.

*Note: If you're on a 28-day pill program, and you forget to take one or two of your "reminder" pills (the last seven in the pack), don't worry. Throw away the ones you missed and keep taking one a day until the pack is empty.

**REMEMBER: MISS ONE, MAKE IT UP.
MISS TWO, BACK IT UP.**

A note about STIs

Keep in mind that the pill only help prevent pregnancy. It does not protect you from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhea, chlamydia, human papillomavirus (which causes genital warts), syphilis and genital herpes—all of which can harm your health and hurt your chances of getting pregnant later on. If you're concerned about STIs, be sure you or your partner use a latex condom every time.