

Sexual Health

ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES “The Pill”



creating healthy communities
together

May 2010

Oral contraceptives prevent a woman from ovulating, or releasing an egg. It is 92-99.7% effective in preventing pregnancy. The Pill does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STI).

How does it work?

- Most oral contraceptive pills contain two female synthetic hormones (estrogen and progesterone).
- Prevents ovulation (release of the egg).
- Thickens cervical mucus which slows movement of sperm through cervix.

Advantages

- Menstrual periods may become more regular and less painful.
- Menstrual periods may become shorter with less bleeding.
- Decreases the risk of endometrial and ovarian cancers.
- May assist with acne.
- Decreases premenstrual symptoms.
- May be used until menopause in healthy women who do not smoke.

Considerations

- Must be prescribed by a health care provider.
- May increase the risk of blood clots, particularly in women who have certain blood disorders or a family history of blood clots.
- Must be taken at the same time every day.
- Not recommended for women over age 35 who smoke.
- Vomiting and diarrhea may affect the absorption of The Pill and increase the risk of pregnancy.
- Some medications can reduce the effectiveness of The Pill. Check with your health care provider or pharmacist and use an additional method of birth control.
- May cause irregular bleeding or spotting.
- May cause breast tenderness, headache, or nausea.

- If you miss any pills, or are very late taking a pill, you could get pregnant. Use an alternate method of contraception for the rest of the package if you are having intercourse.

ACHES: Warning Signs for Combined Hormonal Contraceptive. See a health care provider immediately if you have:

A = Abdominal pain (severe)

C = Chest pain (severe) and/or cough, shortness of breath, or sharp pain on inspiration

H = Headache (severe) and/or dizziness, weakness or numbness, especially if one-sided

E = Eye problems, including vision blurring or loss, and speech difficulties

S = Severe calf or thigh pain, especially with localized warmth/redness

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Protection

The Pill does not protect you against STIs. Use a separate condom, dental dam, latex glove for each sex act.

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.