### Combination Oral Contraceptive Pills: What You Need to Know!

### How do I start the pill?

* The pill may be started on the day it is prescribed (“quick start”), as long as there is no risk of pregnancy. A back-up form of birth control (eg. condoms) is needed for the first seven days after the quick start
* Many women start their pill on the first Sunday after the period starts (because most pill packs are arranged for a Sunday start). Some form of back-up contraception is needed for the first seven days after the Sunday start.
* If the pill is started on the first day of menstruation, no back up contraception is needed.
* **If a condom breaks or slips during the first 7 days, you should use emergency contraception (Plan B/My Way) available in the Dick’s House vending machine. Women who weigh more than 176 pounds should use Ella as their emergency contraception. This is only available by prescription and can be obtained 24/7 from a Dick’s House provider.**

### When Should I take the pill?

At approximately the same time every day. Some women find it helpful to sign up for a text reminder. You can do this easily at **bedsider.org** (and find a lot of other useful information there as well!).

### When Will I Get my “Period”\*?

Most pills are taken on a 28 day cycle with 21 days of hormone pills followed by 7 days of placebo (“sugar pill”). Most women will start bleeding between the 2nd and 4th day of the placebo week. Some women will find that they do not bleed at all during the placebo week. If the woman is not pregnant, this usually means that the pill has completely thinned the uterine lining, a normal effect of the pill.

\*Bleeding during the placebo week occurs after stopping the active hormone pills. This results in shedding of the uterine lining, similar to what happens during a normal menstrual cycle.

**What is “continuous dosing”?**

Some women prefer to take birth control pills continuously because of cramps, PMS, or to avoid bleeding.

Traditional birth control pill packs can be used this way. In this method, the woman takes the first three weeks of a pill pack, then immediately starts a new pack without a break (the last week of placebo pills is not used). This can be continued for as long as desired. Continuous dosing works only with monophasic pills (all one dose, all one color). If spotting or bleeding occurs with this method, contact your health care provider for further advice.

**What if I forget to take one or more combined birth control pills?**

If you forget to take one or more pills, check your package insert for instructions. If you have questions or concerns, call Dick’s House to speak with a provider.

### Possible side effects that usually resolve over time:

If side effects occur, they’re usually mild and go away in the first three to four cycles. If you do have side effects, talk with your health care provider. If the side effects are uncomfortable or if they don’t go away, your health care provider may switch you to a different kind of birth control pill.

* Sore or enlarged breasts
* Breakthrough spotting or bleeding during the active pills
* Mood changes
* Nausea

### Are there any serious side effects of birth control pills that I should be worried about?

* Severe headaches
* Severe leg pain
* Severe abdominal pain
* Chest pain

Women taking the pill may be at higher risk of blood clots. If you’re scheduled for surgery, and won’t be able to move around much after surgery, ask your health care provider about stopping the Pill for 3-4 weeks before surgery and after the surgery until you are up and around. Likewise, if you will be on a long flight, be sure to get up and move around periodically.

### Are there any medications I shouldn’t take while on the pill?

### The effectiveness of the pill may be reduced with some medications:

* The only antibiotic that reduces effectiveness of the pill is rifampin, a drug which is used to treat tuberculosis.
* St. John’s Wort
* Some anticonvulsants

**What if I have more questions?**

Please speak with your provider if you have more questions or take a look at these resources:

* bedsider.org -- comprehensive site for information regarding birth control and other sexual health issues, also helps set up text reminders for pills and appointments if desired
* ec.princeton.edu -- specific information and guidance on the use of emergency contraception

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