

## Oral Contraceptive Pills (OCPs)

### What are oral contraceptive pills?

Oral contraceptive pills (OCPs) are medicines that contain the female hormones estrogen and progesterone. They are often used to prevent pregnancy.

### Why would I want to take OCPs?

If taken properly, OCPs can help:

- Prevent most pregnancies.
- Balance out (regulate) women's menstrual cycles (periods). Periods will not be as heavy or irregular.
- Reduce menstrual cramps.
- Treat or prevent acne.
- Prevent excess hair in unwanted places such as the face, back, etc. This won't make unwanted hair go away but it will keep new hair from forming.
- Lessen symptoms of Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS).
- Lower your chances of getting cancer of the uterus or ovary.



**OCPs do not prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs).** If you are having sex, you should always use latex or polyurethane condoms as a backup method to reduce your risk of infection.

### When should I start taking OCPs?

Your healthcare provider will tell you when to start taking this medicine. Typically, your provider will recommend a *quick start method*. With this method, you start the OCP on any day during the menstrual cycle.

### How should I take OCPs?

Your healthcare provider will tell you if there are any special instructions.

- Most often, you will take one pill by mouth at the same time every day until the pack is complete. You will then continue with a new pack the following day. Make sure to continue pills even when you have your period.
- Taking the pill late or missing pills makes it not work as well. This may cause extra periods or spotting. It could lead to pregnancy if you are sexually active.

## How to take (continued)

- If you miss taking any pills and are sexually active, use condoms or don't have sex for seven days. If you do have sex, use emergency contraception. For more information on emergency contraception, call your health care provider. Also, if you miss pills, follow these directions:
  - **If you miss one pill.** Take the missed pill as soon as possible. Take the next pill as scheduled.
  - **If you miss more than one pill.** Do not take missed pills. Rather, throw away any pills from days missed and restart your daily pills.

## What are the side effects of OCPs?

- Upset stomach (nausea) and vomiting.
- Headaches.
- Sore breasts.
- Vaginal spotting or bleeding.
- Mood changes.

Side effects may lessen after the first few periods. Your healthcare provider may suggest ways to decrease these symptoms or may adjust your medicine to prevent them.

## What are the risks of taking of OCPs?

Smoking while taking OCPs increases the risk of blood clots, heart attacks and other serious side effects. Side effects may include:

- Painful leg swelling.
- Sudden or severe chest pain.
- Stomach (abdominal) pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Severe headache.
- Loss of vision.

If you have any of these side effects, **call 911 or go to the emergency room immediately!**

**ALERT:** Call your health care provider, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if you:

- Are bleeding longer than ten days.
- Are soaking more than one pad or tampon per hour.
- Have special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.**