

# THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL

## WHAT IS THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL?

The combined oral contraceptive pill, often referred to as the birth control pill or just "the pill", is a type of birth control taken orally each day to prevent pregnancy. The pill is one type of **hormonal** birth control. It regulates the change in hormone levels during a person's menstrual cycle by using different forms of synthetic hormones which mimic naturally produced estrogen and progesterone. The birth control pill is available at pharmacies but it requires a prescription.

## HOW IT WORKS

- The pill stops your ovaries from releasing an egg each month
- It makes the mucus in the cervix thicker which makes it harder for the sperm to travel into the cervix (the opening to the uterus)
- The lining of the uterus becomes thinner, making it harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus

## EFFECTIVENESS

The pill is taken every day, ideally at the same time each day. Most pill packages are set up with pills containing estrogen and progesterone for three weeks, followed by a pill-free week or a week of placebo pills (28 pills in a package):

- Typical use failure rate: 90 of 1000 people during first year of use
- Perfect use failure rate: 3 of 1000 women during first year of use

## ADVANTAGES

- Highly effective
- Reversible
- Does not interfere with sex
- May reduce or eliminate menstrual flow and cramps
- Decreases premenstrual symptoms
- Regulates menstrual cycle

**The Birth Control Pill does not protect you from STI's.** Always use a condom from beginning to end of all sexual contact to reduce your risk.

## DISADVANTAGES

- May cause irregular bleeding or spotting
- May cause breast tenderness, nausea or headaches, especially in the first 3 months
- Must be taken every day at the same time
- May increase the risk of blood clots particularly in individuals who have certain blood disorders or a family history of blood clots
- Does not protect against STI's
- Effectiveness may be reduced by other medication a person is taking
- The birth control pill may make you more sensitive to the ultraviolet radiation from the sun and tanning beds – use sunscreen and avoid the use of tanning beds

## POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

A very small number of people may experience serious problems such as a blood clot. You have an increased risk of these problems if you are a smoker, have high blood pressure, or are over 40 years of age. Early warning signs include:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe chest pain or shortness of breath
- Severe headaches, dizziness, weakness, numbness
- Eye problems (vision loss or blurring), speech problems
- Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

**If you experience any of the above call 911 or go to nearest emergency department let staff there know, you are taking the birth control pill.**

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Oral Contraception [sexandu.ca](http://sexandu.ca)
- York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinics **1-800-361-5653, # 1**
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada [itsaplan.ca](http://itsaplan.ca)