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### ▶ **What is the pill?**

The pill is an oral contraceptive that contains artificial hormones (estrogen and progestin).

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### ▶ **How does the pill work?**

The pill prevents pregnancy by:

- stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg
- causing mucus in the cervix to thicken making it hard for sperm to enter the uterus
- causing the lining of the uterus to get thinner making it hard for the fertilized egg to attach

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### ▶ **What are the advantages of the pill?**

- 99% effective in preventing pregnancy if used correctly (92-97% effective with typical use)
- Lighter, shorter, more regular periods
- Less cramping with your periods
- Improvement in acne
- Lower risk of cysts of the ovaries or breasts and of cancer of the ovaries or the lining of the uterus
- Lower risk of endometriosis, tubal pregnancy and anemia.

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### ▶ **What are the possible side effects or risks?**

Side effects from the pill most often occur in the first 3 months. Unless side effects are severe, it is best to continue taking the pill for 3 months before you think about a change in pills.

#### **Some possible side effects:**

- Spotting or bleeding between periods
- Missing a period
- Headaches (if severe or more frequent than usual call your doctor or the clinic)
- Breast tenderness
- Nausea (try taking your pill with food).

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### **CAUTION**

#### ▶ **Seek medical attention at once if you notice any of the following:**

- Severe pain in your legs or abdomen
- Severe chest pain, cough and/or shortness of breath
- Blurring or loss of vision, speech problems
- Depression
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin).

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#### ▶ **How do I use the pill?**

You have 3 options – your health care provider will suggest which one is best for you.

##### ▼ **Option 1: Quick Start**

- Take your first birth control pill the day of your clinic appointment
- Use condoms for birth control for the first seven days.

##### ▼ **Option 2: First Day Start**

- Take your first birth control pill the day you begin your period.

##### ▼ **Option 3: Sunday Start**

- Take your first birth control pill on the first Sunday **after** your period **begins**
- You may still be bleeding when you start the pill
- If your period starts on a Sunday, take your first pill that day.

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#### ▶ **Taking your pill (28-day package)**

- Take one pill every day for 28 days
- Always take your pill at the same time
- When you have finished one package, start a new package the very next day
- Your period will usually start during the last week of pills, when you are taking the hormone-free (placebo) pills.

The hormone-free (placebo) pills are the last pills in your pack. They are a different colour than the other pills and have no active ingredient – they help you get in the habit of taking a pill every day. If you forget to take a placebo pill, throw it out and take your next pill at the usual time.

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#### ▶ **Are there times the pill may not be effective?**

Yes, you should use condoms for additional protection:

- When waiting to start the pill
- For the first 7 days after starting the pill
- If you vomit within one hour of taking the pill or have diarrhea for two or more days
- If you are taking certain medications (prescription or over-the-counter) you may need to use condoms during treatment and for 7 days after you finish your medication. Always check with your health care provider or pharmacist to be sure.

If you have unprotected or condomless sex during a time when the pill might not be effective, contact the Sexual Health clinic, your health care provider or pharmacist about the need for emergency contraception.

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#### **Will I gain weight on the pill?**

It is a common myth that the pill causes weight gain, but studies have shown no relationship between the pill and weight gain.

The estrogen in the pill may make some women feel bloated at first, but this typically gets better.

Many women start birth control pills during their teens when their body has not reached adulthood and weight gain during your teens and early adulthood is normal.

To help maintain a healthy weight you should be sure to eat a healthy diet and stay physically active.

# Help - I missed my pill(s)

I missed one pill by less than 24 hours

▶ Take it as soon as you remember and continue your pill pack

I missed one pill more than 24 hours or missed more than one pill

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During week one of the pill pack	During week two or three of pill pack
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I missed one or more pills	I missed less than three pills	I missed three or more pills
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<p>Take 1 active pill as soon as possible and keep taking 1 pill daily until the end of the pack.</p> <p>Abstain from intercourse or use condoms for the next 7 days.</p> <p>If you have had unprotected intercourse within the last 5 days, consider using emergency contraception.</p>	<p>Take 1 active pill as soon as possible &amp; keep taking 1 pill daily until you finish all the active pills.</p> <p>Discard the placebo or reminder pills &amp; start a new pack without a break.</p> <p>You may have some spotting or bleeding but may miss your period this cycle.</p>	<p>Take 1 active pill as soon as possible &amp; keep taking 1 pill daily until you finish all the active pills.</p> <p>Discard the placebo or reminder pills and start a new pack.</p> <p>Abstain from intercourse or use condoms for the next 7 days.</p> <p>If you have had unprotected intercourse within the last 5 days, consider emergency contraception.</p>
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## ▶ Things to Remember

- The pill does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You should use condoms every time you have sex.
- It is important to have a yearly physical while you are on the pill.
- When you are taking the birth control pill you are strongly advised not to smoke. Cigarette smoking increases the risk of serious adverse effects on the heart and blood vessels. This risk increases with age.
- Estrogen-containing pill can suppress milk production and is generally not recommended for breastfeeding women.
- Progestin-only pill (POP) can be used by breastfeeding women at 6 weeks post-partum onwards.

## ▶ Who can you talk to if you have more questions?

If you have concerns or questions, call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit the health unit website below.



**simcoe muskoka**  
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

Tel: 705-721-7520  
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520  
[www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org)

## ▶ Resources

Stay on Schedule (SOS): [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

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# The Birth Control Pill

