



## What is “the pill?”

Using oral contraceptives, also known as “the pill,” is a common way women can prevent pregnancy. It contains artificial hormones (estrogen and progestin) which are taken by mouth every day. **It is 99 percent effective when used properly.**

The pill is easy to use. It also:

- Does not interfere with sex
- Can improve acne
- Can reduce cramping and bleeding (lighter periods)
- May help protect against endometrial and ovarian cancer
- Helps protect against Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

## Lake County Health Department Community Health Centers

**For appointments, call our  
Patient Access Center:  
(847) 377-8800**

Belvidere Medical Building\*  
2400 Belvidere Rd, Waukegan, IL

Grand Avenue Health Center  
3010 Grand Ave, Waukegan, IL

Libertyville Health Center  
18698 West Peterson Rd, Libertyville, IL

Midlakes Health Center\*  
224 Clarendon Rd, Round Lake Beach, IL

North Chicago Health Center\*  
2215 14th St, North Chicago, IL

North Shore Health Center  
1840 Green Bay Rd, Highland Park, IL

Zion Health Center\*  
1911 27th St, Zion, IL

Round Lake Area Student Health and Wellness  
Center\* (located inside Round Lake High School)  
800 North High School Dr, Round Lake, IL  
Appointments: (847) 257-1200

*Lake County Health Department services are available to all individuals regardless of race, color, national origin, age, sex, disability or sexual orientation. Please inform a staff member if you need an interpreter, assistance, or auxiliary aids.*

*\*Program funding includes a grant from the Illinois Department of Public Health, Family Planning Program*



## Oral Contraceptives

*What you need to know  
about “the pill”*

## When do I start my pills?

- If your period started on Sunday, begin this day.
- If your period started on a different day than Sunday, you will start the first Sunday following your period starting.

## How do I take my pills?

1. First, take the 21 hormone pills, one pill a day.
  - It doesn't matter what time you take your pills, as long as you take them at the same time every day.
2. Next, take the seven different colored "reminder pills" once a day.
  - Your period should come while you are taking the reminder pills, and may last anywhere from a few hours to seven days.
  - Take all seven reminder pills, regardless of when your period starts or how long it lasts.
3. Begin a new pack of pills after completing the reminder pills.
  - You will always start your new pack of pills on a Sunday.

## How many pills do I have to take until I'm safe (protected) from getting pregnant?

- One pack of pills.
- Use condoms the first month that you start taking the pill to prevent pregnancy.
- You will need to continue taking the pills daily to prevent pregnancy.

## What if I forget to take a pill?

- Take it as soon as you remember.
  - If this isn't until the next day, take two pills. You will still be safe from getting pregnant.
- If you miss two hormone pills in a row, take two pills for each of the next two days. **You may not be safe from getting pregnant!**
- Continue your pills, but use condoms until you complete that pack of pills.
- If you miss three or more hormone pills in a row, **you will not be safe from getting pregnant!**
  - Call your doctor for instructions about how and when to restart them.
  - Keep in mind it is very common to have breakthrough bleeding if you forget to take a pill.

## Can I take other medications while I'm taking the pill?

- Your birth control pill may not work when taken with certain prescription or over the counter medications.
- When another medication is ordered for you, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it will interfere with your birth control pills.

## What if I run out of pills?

- Try not to! Always know how many packs of pills you have on hand.
- When you start your last pack, plan to come to the clinic.
- If you pick up from the pharmacy, make sure to pick up on time each month.

## What if I have bleeding or spotting between my periods?

Breakthrough bleeding or spotting is very common for the first few months. It can also occur when you do not take your pills at the same time every day.

- The bleeding may be like a normal period or it may just be brown spotting.
- **Do not stop your pills.** Continue taking them as directed.

**If the bleeding continues beyond the first two or three months even though you are taking your pills correctly, or if it becomes heavier than a normal period, call your doctor.**

## Important note

The pill does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## WARNING Signs of Possible Complications

Some women on the pill experience side effects. The pill may cause headaches, nausea, weight gain, spotting between periods, and moodiness. There is a small chance of blood clots leading to stroke or heart attack.

**Call your doctor immediately if you have any of these symptoms:**

- Headaches
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain
- Abdominal pain
- Leg or arm pain