

**Whole Woman's Health of McAllen**  
*Transforming Healthcare One Woman at a Time*  
802 South Main St. \* McAllen, TX 78501  
(956) 686-2137 \* (866) 682-1200

**COMBINATION ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES—“The Pill”  
(BIRTH CONTROL PILLS)**

***What is it?***

Oral contraceptives, or “the birth control pill,” are a hormonal medication taken daily by mouth to prevent pregnancy.

***How does it work?***

Combination pills contain estrogen and progestin. Combination pills usually work by preventing a woman's ovaries from releasing eggs (ovulation). They also thicken the cervical mucus, which keeps sperm from joining with an egg.

***How do I use it? How do I get it?***

A doctor or clinician will do an exam, review your medical history, and prescribe the pill. The pill must be taken every day at the same time. Some medications, such as antibiotics, anti-fungals, and seizure medications, may interfere with the pill's effectiveness.

***What are the advantages?***

The pill is very effective when taken correctly. It does not interrupt sex in any way, allowing for more spontaneity.

Taking hormonal contraceptives can provide some additional benefits other than contraceptive ones. These include less painful menstruation, acne reduction, fewer pelvic infections, and decreased risks of endometrial and ovarian cancer.

***What are the disadvantages? What are the possible side effects?***

Most side effects of the pill are not serious. The most common side effects are nausea, vomiting, bleeding between menstrual periods, weight gain, breast tenderness, and difficulty wearing contact lenses. These side effects, especially nausea, and vomiting, may subside within the first three months of use.

The serious side effects of the pill occur very infrequently, especially if you are in good health and do not smoke. However, you should know that certain medical conditions have been associated with or made worse by the pill, including blood clots, liver tumors, and high blood pressure. Notify Whole Woman's Health if you notice any unusual physical disturbances while taking the pill.

***How effective is it?***

The pill is 99% effective when taken perfectly. It is 92% effective with typical (imperfect) use.

***Who cannot use this method?***

For the majority of women, oral contraceptives can be taken safely. But there are some women who are at high risk of developing certain serious diseases that can be life-threatening or may cause temporary or permanent disability or death. The risks associated with taking oral contraceptives increase significantly if you:

- Smoke
- Have high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol
- Have or have had clotting disorders, heart attack, stroke, agina pectoris, cancer of the breast or sex organs, jaundice, or malignant or benign liver tumors

You should not take the pill if you suspect you are pregnant or have unexplained vaginal bleeding.

\*\*\*Remember, only a latex condom or polyurethane condom can protect you from HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.

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**WHAT TO DO IF YOU MISS PILLS:**

If you miss one “active” pill:

1. Take it as soon as you remember. Take the next pill at your regular time. This means you may take two pills in one day.
2. You do not need to use a back up method if you have sex.

If you miss two “active” pills in a row:

1. Take two pills on the day you remember and two pills the next day.
2. Then take one pill a day until you finish the pack.
3. You **MAY BECOME PREGNANT** if you have intercourse in the 7 days after you miss pills. To be safe you must use a back up method such as condoms or the “morning after pill” (emergency contraception) for those 7 days.

**IF YOU ARE STILL NOT SURE WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE PILLS YOU HAVE MISSED:**

1. Use a back-up method such as condoms and foam any time you have intercourse.
2. Keep taking one active pill each day
3. Call Whole Woman's Health with any questions

If you are struggling with taking the pill correctly and on schedule, we have many other contraception options for you. We are here to help you find the method that is best for you—don't be afraid to call us.

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