



**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**Family Planning Program**

**INFORMATION FOR *COMBINED* ORAL  
CONTRACEPTIVE**

The combined pills contain both estrogen and progesterone. The pill is about 95 percent to 99 percent effective when taken correctly and each day.

**BENEFITS:**

- \* Fewer menstrual cramps and bleeding
- \* Regular periods
- \* Less pain at ovulation
- \* Improvement in acne
- \* Reduced PMS symptoms

**DECREASED RISK OF:**

- \* Ovarian or Endometrial cancer
- \* Benign breast tumors or ovarian cysts
- \* Ectopic pregnancy
- \* Anemia

**RISKS/SIDE EFFECTS:** While using the pill, you may have the following side effects:

- \* Spotting between periods
- \* Weight changes (uncommon)
- \* Decreased milk supply (breastfeeding)
- \* Cardiovascular Complications (including elevated blood pressure)
- \* Nausea
- \* Breast tenderness
- \* Headaches
- \* Change in libido
- \* Mood changes/depression
- \* Worse acne

To decrease your chances of serious problems, you need to go to an emergency room, doctor, or clinic if you have any of the following symptoms:

**EARLY PILL DANGER SIGNS:**

- A** -- Abdominal pain (severe)
- C** -- Chest pain or shortness of breath
- H** -- Headaches (severe)
- E** -- Eye problems -- blurred vision, flashing lights, or blindness
- S** -- Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

**ALTERNATIVES:** You have received written information about the other methods of birth control that are available. For situations of suspected contraception failure, emergency contraception is available and offers a second chance to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** You have received information about the birth control pill and how to use it. The pill does not protect against STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) or HIV.

**DECISION TO STOP TAKING PILLS:** You may stop taking birth control pills at any time. A woman is most likely to become pregnant if she or her partner does not use a method of birth control.

**QUESTIONS:** You may ask questions about birth control pills at any time and may contact the clinic with further questions.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING COMBINED ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE (BIRTH CONTROL PILLS)

1. There are three satisfactory ways to start taking your birth control pills. You should discuss with your provider which approach is right for you.
  - Start on the first day of menstrual bleeding.
  - Start on the first Sunday after your period begins.
  - Start today if you are certain that you are not pregnant.
2. Swallow one pill every day until you finish the pack.
  - If you are using a 21-day pack, stop one week and then start a new pack.
  - If you are using a 28-day pack, begin a new pack immediately. Skip no days between packages.
3. Try to associate taking your pill with some regularly scheduled activity like going to bed, eating a meal or brushing your teeth. This may make it easier to remember. Pills work best if you take one about the same time every day in order to keep the proper amount of medication in your system. This is especially important if you have bleeding between your periods.
4. If you miss no pills and skip a period, pregnancy is unlikely. It is common for women taking birth control pills to miss periods occasionally. If you are worried or have symptoms of pregnancy, call the clinic. Otherwise, start a new package of pills at the regular scheduled time. (See # 7 below).
5. Check your pack of birth control pills every morning to make sure you took your pill the day before.
  - \* If you miss one pill, take the tablet as soon as you remember it. Take your next tablet at the regular time. You probably will not get pregnant but you may want to use a backup method for seven days after the missed pill.
  - \* If you miss two pills in a row, take two tablets as soon as you remember and take two tablets the next day. Then return to your regular schedule. Use a backup method for seven days after two missed tablets.
  - \* If you miss three pills in a row, you will probably begin your period. Whether or not you are menstruating, throw away the rest of your pack and begin your next pack as you did when you first started the pills. For example, if you started on Sunday, begin your next pack on Sunday. If you started on any other day, you may start your next pack immediately. Use a backup method until you have been back on the new pack of pills for seven days.
  - \* **Emergency contraception is available if you were sexually active any of the days you missed pills.**
  - \* If the pills you miss are from the fourth week of a 28-day pack, throw away the missed pills. Continue taking pills from your current package of pills on schedule. The pills in this fourth week do not contain hormones, so this does not increase your risk of pregnancy.
  - \* If you miss one or more pills and miss a period, you should stop taking pills and contact your Family Planning clinic or health-care provider for a pregnancy test. You may want to consider using another method of birth control.
6. A backup method may not be necessary if you started the pills on the first day of bleeding. For a Sunday start, use another method of birth control as a backup method for the next seven days. Keep a backup method handy all the time.
7. If you miss two periods, come to the clinic for a pregnancy test, even if you have taken your pills every day right on schedule.
8. If you become ill and have several days of diarrhea or vomiting, use a backup means of birth control for the remainder of that cycle (until next menstrual period starts). Start a new pack of pills with the next menstrual period.
9. It is not uncommon for women to have some spotting when they first start to use the pill. If the bleeding is heavy or occurs for two or more cycles, call the clinic.

10. You may discontinue use of the pill at any time if you decide you want to become pregnant. Contact the clinic for preconception information and prenatal care options in your area.
11. When you are seen by a health-care provider for other problems, or are admitted to a hospital, be sure to mention that you are using birth control pills.
12. Antacids, vitamin C, some prescribed medications and some herbal supplements may interfere with the efficiency of either the oral contraceptives or that particular medication. Consult your family planning clinic or other health-care provider before taking other medications.
13. You will be given an extensive pamphlet about your birth control pill to read. The pamphlet is produced by your birth control pill manufacturer. Read the whole pamphlet carefully.
14. It is your responsibility to learn the side effects of the pill and the pill danger signs (listed on the reverse side under Risks/Side Effects). Do not ignore these problems or wait to see if they go away. Call the Family Planning clinic or your health-care provider immediately and explain your problem. Note that the first letter of the pill danger signals spells out the word ACHES.