

# Quick Starting the Birth Control Pill

## ***What is Quick Start?***

The "quick start" approach to using birth control pills means starting the pill the same day it's prescribed, no matter where you are in your cycle, instead of waiting to start till the Sunday after your next period.

## ***Why would I want to do that?***

Sometimes, the best of intentions don't work out. You might end up not starting because you never get your next period because you've risked pregnancy while waiting for it.

## ***Why else would someone not begin their first Pill pack?***

- confusion about instructions
- loss of motivation
- fear of side effects
- decided to change methods

Quick Start alleviates these problems. By taking the first pill in the office, all you have to remember after leaving is to follow your daily pill schedule. By being there when the first pill is taken, the clinician can answer any questions. Since pills are started during the school/work week, odds are staff will be available if you call in refills. This availability keeps women from quitting the method when they are unable to come in on weekends.

## ***What about side effects or making my cycle weird?***

Results from two small studies have found more women continued taking their BCPs using Quick Start and had no adverse impact on bleeding patterns. Before quick starting, your provider will screen for pregnancy if indicated.

Oral contraceptive pills are one of the most effective methods of birth control, but they must be taken consistently and correctly. Pills may be started in 3 ways:

- first day of next period (often preferred because no backup method is needed);
- first Sunday after menstrual bleeding begins;
- immediately, if pregnancy is ruled out (Quick Start).

## ***How does the Pill work to prevent pregnancy?***

The pill prevents pregnancy by suppressing the release of an egg from the ovary. It can work right away, if started early in the cycle — before day 5. The first day of bleeding in a period is considered day 1 of your cycle. Since either the quick-start method or the Sunday start technique may happen after the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the cycle, it's safest to use a backup method of contraception through the first month.

## ***PILL DANGER SIGNS***

Remember the Pill danger signs. Think of the word **ACHES**:

**A:** abdominal pain (severe)

**C:** chest pain (severe) or shortness of breath

**H:** headaches (severe)

**E:** eye problems or blurred vision

**S:** severe leg pain

If you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical care immediately. \*The risk of side effects is greater if you smoke!!

## ***BLEEDING OR SPOTTING***

Bleeding is not unusual if you have missed one or more Pills, or if you have been taking the Pill less than 2 months. If bleeding is still a problem after 2 months, talk to your clinician. Switching to another brand of Pill often solves this problem. In most cases, bleeding is not serious and will stop after a few days. But *if bleeding is very heavy or if you have cramps, pain or fever, call your clinician right away.* These may be signs of a pelvic infection.

## ***A MISSED PERIOD***

If you miss a menstrual period, and you are **sure** you have taken all the Pills in your last pack correctly, you can start your next pack on schedule anyway. If you have skipped 2 periods in a row, or think you may have missed one or more Pills, you should arrange for a pregnancy test.

Also pay attention to other possible signs of pregnancy:

- breast tenderness and swelling
- fatigue
- nausea and sensitivity to odors; vomiting
- frequent urination

If you have any of these signs of pregnancy and have missed a period, take a pregnancy test.

### **THE PILL AND OTHER DRUGS**

Whenever you take a medication in addition to birth control pills, you should check with your clinician. Some drugs are affected by birth control pills [insulin, certain tranquilizers and anticoagulants] and birth control pills may be less effective in combination with some drugs [certain antibiotics, antihistamines and tranquilizers].

A back up method of birth control is recommended if you are taking a drug that may lower the effectiveness of the Pill.

Always tell any clinician caring for you that you are taking the Pill, when you are treated for any medical problems, even if the problem seems to be unrelated to the Pills.

California State University  
**Northridge**

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