

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I have sex and haven't been using any birth control or a condom breaks or slips?

You can take emergency contraceptive pills (often called “the morning after pill”) within 72 hours of unprotected sex, but recent studies indicate that emergency contraception may be more effective if taken within the first 24 hours of unprotected sex. This reduces your chance of becoming pregnant. The effectiveness in preventing pregnancy is up to 75%. Regular BCPs are much more effective (98-99) than emergency contraception. Keep an extra packet of emergency contraception with you for an emergency situation as when Campus Health is closed for a 3 day weekend.

What if I have spotting or bleeding at unusual times?

- Spotting or “breakthrough bleeding” which occurs while a woman is taking BCPs happens most frequently during the first three pill cycles. This is because the uterine lining is adjusting to a lower estrogen and progesterin level than is usually present.
- Breakthrough bleeding can sometimes be caused by missed pills, drug interactions, and infections.
- If you are having a problem with spotting or bleeding that is persisting past the first three cycles and it is not associated with missed pills, call Women’s Health (621-7617 or 621-6542). These issues are best evaluated individually and an appointment may be scheduled to see a Women’s Health provider.

What if I don't have any period at all? Doesn't that mean I'm pregnant?

- Women taking BCPs note that their periods tend to be shorter and lighter, and they may see no fresh blood at all. A drop of blood or a brown smudge on your tampon, pad or on your underwear during the week you are taking the placebo (no hormone) pills, is counted as your period while you are on BCPs.
- If you have not missed any BCPs and you miss one period without any other signs or symptoms, pregnancy is very unlikely. Many women miss one period every now and then. Call Women’s Health if you are worried.
- If you have missed two or more BCPs and missed a period, Urine pregnancy tests are very reliable and will diagnose pregnancy 12-14 days after ovulation. They are available at the Campus Health Pharmacy and most drug stores.
- If you miss two periods in a row, call Women’s Health right away for an evaluation and pregnancy test, even if you did not miss any BCPs.
- Many women skip periods while taking birth control pills. This is not dangerous or a health risk as long as pregnancy has been ruled out.

I missed taking some of my pills. What do I do?

- One pill missed: Take the missed pill as soon as you can and continue taking your BCPs daily, no emergency contraception is needed.
- Missed 2-4 pills: Take one of the missed pills and today’s pill. If this occurs:

In Week 1, you need emergency contraception, a backup method for the next 7 days, and to finish your pack on the regular schedule.

In Week 2, you do not need emergency contraception or a backup method; finish your pill pack on the regular schedule.

In Week 3, you do not need emergency contraception or a backup method. You should skip the rest of your current pack and start fresh with a new one. Do not take the placebo pills this time because a break of more than 7 days from active pills may increase the risk of pregnancy.

Missed 5+ BCPs: Take one of the missed BCPs and today's pill and skip the rest in your current pack, starting fresh with a new pill pack. You will need emergency contraception. You will need to use a backup method of birth control for 7 days.

- If one or more placebo pills are missed, (no active pills missed), ignore the missed pills and continue with your current pill pack on schedule.

Why do I feel so nauseous?

Nausea is much less common with the combination (low dose) BCPs. However, some women have nausea the first month or two they take BCPs. This tends to go away in the next cycle. To relieve nausea, try taking your pills in the evening or with food. If nausea continues for more than two cycles or is severe, see your provider.

Is it normal for my breasts to be sore?

Some women will notice an increase (or decrease) in breast tenderness. Often this will disappear or improve over the first few months. If it is severe, discuss this with your provider at the three-month follow up visit.

Does the pill cause mood changes?

Most women do not notice mood changes when taking oral contraceptives. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) symptoms tend to improve on BCPs. However, some women may experience depression, irritability, or increased PMS when starting oral contraceptives. If the symptoms are severe or persistent, contact your provider.

I don't want to gain weight. Does the pill cause weight gain?

Most women do not notice weight changes on BCPs. As many women lose weight as gain weight on BCPs. If you have concerns regarding weight gain, talk with your provider. Sometimes changing to another pill will be helpful.

What danger signs or problems should I know about?

Serious complications such as blood clots may occur, but are very rare. Call Women's Health (621-7617) or an emergency room if you have any of the following "aches":

- A** - Abdominal pain (severe)
- C** - Chest pain (severe), shortness of breath or cough
- H** - Headache (severe) not relieved by pain medication, dizziness or numbness
- E** - Eye problems (loss of vision or blurring), speech problems
- S** - Severe leg pain (usually only in one calf or thigh)

What if I am a smoker and on BCPs?

Any women who smokes fifteen or more cigarettes per day, whether they take BCPs or not, run a higher risk of heart and circulatory problems. In women who are pregnant and in women over age thirty-five, we advise that they stop smoking immediately to avoid dangerous risks to all concerned. When you are thinking of quitting, call the Arizona Smokers' Helpline at (800) 556-6222 or call a provider at Women's Health (621-6542 or 621-7617).

Will I be able to get pregnant after I stop taking the pill?

- Some women are able to conceive immediately after discontinuing BCPs while others may experience a delay of 23 months. After 2 months, fertility rates are the same whether you are a previous user of BCPs or never used them.
- BCPs are a good option for women who want to become pregnant in the future. By preventing causes of infertility such as uterine fibroids, ectopic pregnancies, ovarian

- cysts, endometrial cancer and possible endometriosis, BCPs may actually improve your future ability to become pregnant.
- If your periods are irregular prior to taking BCPs, they may again become irregular after stopping BCPs.
 - Return of fertility is **not** improved by periodically “taking a break” from BCPs; taking a break is not medically helpful in any way. Studies have shown that women who don’t take BCPs are actually more likely to have a serious medical problem requiring admission to the hospital than women who take BCPs.

Does the pill cause cancer?

- BCPs decrease a woman’s risk for cancers of the ovaries and the uterine lining. Taking them also lowers your chances of having benign or non-cancerous breast lumps and ovarian cysts.
- Evidence strongly indicates that BPCs have little or no effect on the risk of breast cancer regardless of user age, duration of use, or estrogen content of the pill.

The information provided above is for educational purposes only. Please do not use this information to diagnose yourself. If you have further questions or concerns about this topic or any others, please contact us at the numbers below.

Important University of Arizona Campus Health Service phone numbers:

Women’s Health Main number:	621-6512 or 621-6542
Appointments:	621-9202
Medical Questions (RN):	621-7617
Laboratory:	621-6513
Pharmacy:	621-6516
Medical Records:	621-4068