Taking birth control pills (BCPs) is an effective way to prevent you from getting pregnant if you take them correctly.

Here’s how to use them:

1. Start your pills as checked below:
   - Start today. During the first 7 days of pills, use a condom or abstain from having sex. You are protected from pregnancy after taking the pills for one week. If you miss your first period, come in for a pregnancy test.
   - Start on the first day of your next period. You are protected from pregnancy right away.
   - Start on the first Sunday after the first day of your next period. During the first 7 days of pills, use a condom or abstain from having sex. You are protected from pregnancy after taking the pills for one week.

2. Take one pill every single day.

3. Take your pill at about the same time each day. To remember to take the pill, link it to something you do every day like brushing your teeth, eating a meal, or going to bed.

4. Even if you have some bleeding or nausea (upset stomach) in the first 3 months, keep taking your pills.

5. If you forget to take one pill, take it as soon as you remember.

6. If you forget to take two or more pills, and you are sexually active, you are at risk for getting pregnant. See the part of this tip sheet called “What if I forget to take a pill?”

7. Always use a condom when you have sex. Using a condom helps protect you against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The pill does not protect against STDs.

8. Call Kaiser Permanente if you have questions or problems with the pill, or if you need emergency contraception pills (ECPs).

How does the pill work?

While you are taking the pill, your ovaries don’t release an egg so you can’t get pregnant. Because preventing ovulation also helps to lessen heavy bleeding and menstrual cramps, sometimes young women who aren’t having sex take the pill too.

Is the pill safe?

For younger women, birth control pills are extremely safe. Major side effects are very rare. Taking the pill does not increase your risk of breast cancer or make it more difficult for you to get pregnant later in life.

In addition to providing excellent birth control, there are other health benefits.

- Periods are more regular.
- Periods are shorter, with less bleeding and cramping.
- Less acne.
- Reduced risk of developing uterine, colon, and ovarian cancer.
- Reduced risk of bone loss and less hirsutism (extra body hair).
- Reduced risk of fibrocystic breast disease (noncancerous lumps).

How many pills do I take?

Take one pill every day for 28 days in a row until you finish the entire package. Your period will usually start when you reach the 24th pill. After you take the last pill, start a new package the next day.

What about side effects?

Weight

Sometimes a teen might gain or lose some weight on the pill, but most teens stay at the same weight.

Bleeding between periods

You might get some spotting (irregular bleeding). After a few months, your periods will become lighter, with less spotting.

Nausea or headaches

You might feel a little sick to your stomach when you first start taking the pill. If this happens, try taking your pill after eating or before bed. The pill can also cause headaches in some people.

Don’t stop taking the pill without calling your doctor first.

If spotting, nausea, or headaches continue into your 3rd month, or if it’s serious enough that you’re thinking of stopping the pill, call your doctor at Kaiser Permanente before you make any changes. (Stopping the pill suddenly can cause spotting and bleeding, and leave you without birth control until you make a new plan.)

Pill warning signals

Some of the following may be signs of a serious medical condition. If you experience any of these problems after starting the pills, stop taking them and call your clinician. Youngest women are at lowest risk.

(continued on back)
• Severe chest pain, arm pain, shortness of breath.
• Severe headaches, vomiting, dizziness, fainting, muscle weakness or numbness, or speech changes.
• Vision change: blurred, flashing lights, or vision loss.
• Severe leg pain.

**What if I miss a period?**
If you miss your first period after starting the pills, and if you are sexually active, come to Kaiser Permanente for a pregnancy test. After several months on the pill, your periods will become lighter. You may even miss a period. This can be normal while taking the pill. But if you have missed pills and you don't get your period for 2 months in a row, it is important to come in for a pregnancy test right away.

**What if I forget to take 1 pill?**
• If you forget to take 1 pill, take it as soon as you remember no matter what time it is.
• Keep taking your remaining pills as usual. (This might mean taking 2 pills on the same day.)
• Emergency contraception is usually not needed. It's safest to use a condom and/or another backup method for the next 7 days.

**What if I miss 2 pills in a row?**
If you miss 2 or more pills, you are at risk for getting pregnant.
• Take the most recent pill you missed as soon as possible. Then call us for instructions on when to take your next pill.
• The safest choice is to avoid having sex until you have taken 7 days of pills. If you do have sex, use a condom and/or other birth control method(s).
• If you've missed 2 or more pills and had sex within 5 days without using a condom or other method of birth control, please call us right away for emergency contraception.
• If you miss pills, you will notice some spotting. This will go away after you get back on schedule.

**What about emergency contraception?**
Emergency contraception pills (ECPs) can prevent pregnancy if you:
• Have had sex without using birth control.
• Have a problem with your birth control, such as the condom tore or slipped off.
• Have sex after missing 2 or more birth control pills, are late for a contraceptive shot, or forget to insert the ring or apply the patch.
• Are forced to have sex.

If you have had unprotected sex, call us as soon as possible. You can take ECPs for up to 5 days after you have unprotected sex, but the sooner you start taking ECPs, the better they work.

**Need emergency contraception?**
You can talk to an advice nurse anytime by calling 1-866-454-8855. This call is free and private. Unless someone is hurting you, we won't tell anyone you called.

**Another way to take the pill: Continuously**
Did you know that you can safely take the pill in a different way and skip having your period? Just think—no more cramps or PMS, plus pregnancy prevention.

**How to take the pill continuously**
Take 1 pill every day as usual for 3 weeks. When you get to the last week of placebo pills (sugar pills), throw away the pack and start a new pack of pills.

This means you will start a new pack of pills every 3 weeks, instead of every 4 weeks. You can take the pill this way without having a period for as long as you like.

Some spotting is common, especially at first. If you have been taking the pill daily for 3 months and still have spotting or bleeding, you can stop the pill for 3 days, then return to taking it daily. If the spotting persists, you can discuss other strategies with your health care provider.

**Is it safe?**
Taking pills continuously is safe and easy to do. It is not necessary to have a period each month. Don't worry—blood isn't backing up in your uterus. Taking the pill this way changes your hormones and thins the lining of your uterus so that you don't have a period.

**Other resources**
- kp.org/mydoctor
- Kids Health Teen Site kidshealth.org/teen
- “Go Ask Alice,” Columbia University’s Question and Answer Site goaskalice.columbia.edu/
- The New Teenage Body Book, Wibbelsman and McCoy
- Planned Parenthood plannedparenthood.org
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are being hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or being pressured to have sex, it can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or connect to loveisrespect.org.