

Oral Contraceptives (The Pill)

If you are reading this, then you have either decided to start using birth control or you are at least considering the idea. That's great! Although abstinence is the only choice that keeps you 100% safe from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), if you decide to become sexually active, you have to start thinking about ways to protect yourself. Congratulations on taking the first step to keeping yourself safe!

What are Oral Contraceptives?

All oral contraceptives must be prescribed by a doctor and contain hormones such as estrogen and/or progesterone. These hormones work in various ways to prevent conception, but the three most common ways are:

- The hormones prevent ovulation each month;
- The hormones thicken the cervical mucus, which makes it difficult for sperm to enter the uterus; and
- The hormones alter the uterine lining, making it difficult for an egg to implant.

Overall, hormonal methods are highly effective in preventing pregnancy when used correctly. However, before choosing the method that is best for you, there are some things to consider.



What are the Advantages of the Pill?

There are many health benefits and advantages that are provided by oral contraceptives. These include:

- Highly effective and reversible
 - Regulates menstrual cycle
 - Less severe menstrual cramps
- Decreased risk of anemia (iron deficiency)
 - Reduced risk of ovarian cysts
- Protects against Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
 - Decreased acne
- Reduces the risk of endometriosis symptoms
 - Prevents osteoporosis
 - Does not affect future fertility
 - Easy to use
- Different brands available (with different amounts of hormones) increasing the likelihood of an individual finding one that works for them.

What are the Disadvantages of the Pill?

Despite the many advantages of the pill, there are also risks and disadvantages that must be considered before deciding if oral contraceptives are right for you, such as:

- Increased risk of a heart attack, stroke, blood clots, etc.
 - High blood pressure
 - Headaches
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Depression
- Breakthrough bleeding/spotting
- Decreased enjoyment of sex
 - Weight gain
- Drug interactions (some antibiotics, antifungals, etc. can change the amount of contraceptive hormones absorbed, altering the pill's effectiveness)
 - Does not protect against STIs
- Inconvenient (must remember to take every day at the same time)

How often do you have sex?

This may seem a little personal but if you only have sex once every 2 or 3 months, you may not need to consider hormonal birth control. You might want to consider a birth control method that you only need to use when you have sex. You may choose to use a barrier method such as condoms, contraceptive sponges, or a diaphragm instead of the Pill or Depo, which prevent pregnancy over the long term. If you are interested in learning more about barrier methods, see our "Barrier Birth Control Methods" pamphlet.

Do you want long-term birth control?

You know that you definitely do not want any children, or at least not for a long time... or maybe, you already have children and do not want any more. You may be looking for a form of birth control that is going to work for a long period of time (more than 1 year). Hormonal methods are good options for long term birth control.

Are you opposed to using hormones?

Some individuals choose not to use hormones. They may be opposed to taking a "man made" medication that interferes with their body's own cycles. If you are one of these individuals, then you would probably opt for the Fertility Awareness Method or Rhythm Method, or an IUD (ask any Planned Parenthood staff member for more details).

Also, some individuals should not take hormonal birth control for medical reasons. For example, if you are prone to migraines, depression, blood clots, or heart problems, you will not be able to use most hormonal methods. Check with your doctor if you have any medical concerns.

If you have any further questions regarding oral contraceptives or would like to see a healthcare provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

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