

Combined Hormonal Oral Contraceptive (The Pill)

What is The Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill?

The Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill is usually simply called The Pill. It is a tablet that contains the hormones oestrogen & progestogen.

How does it work?

You take one pill every day from a sheet of pills.

When you take The Pill, the two hormones work together to prevent pregnancy by stopping the release of an egg each month (ovulation).

The hormones cause a thickening of the mucus in the cervix, which stops sperm from entering the uterus (womb).

The pill pack contains a number of non-hormonal (sugar) pills. You will usually have vaginal bleeding, like a period, during the days you take these pills.

How can I get The Pill?

Step 1

Talk to a doctor. If you are considering starting The Pill, you will need to talk to a doctor to discuss whether The Pill is right for you. If it is, they will provide you with a prescription (script).

Step 2

Fill your prescription at the pharmacy (chemist).

The Pill is available from most pharmacies with a prescription. The cost of The Pill is largely dependent on whether you have a Concession and/or Medicare card.

Step 3

Take The Pill. It's important that you take The Pill at the same time every day. Follow the instructions given to you by your doctor and/or pharmacist.

How effective is The Pill?

- The Pill is a tablet that needs to be taken at the same time each day.
- If used perfectly, it is over **99.5%** effective at preventing pregnancy.
- The Pill can be less effective if it is missed or not taken reliably. With typical use, it is 93% effective.
- It can be less effective if you vomit within two hours of taking it or have an illness with diarrhoea.
- Certain medications, including epileptic and herbal remedies, can reduce the effectiveness of The Pill.



Advantages of The Pill

- Works well when taken reliably.
- Can reduce period pain and heavy menstrual bleeding.
- Can be used to skip periods.
- Fertility typically returns immediately when you stop taking The Pill.
- Can help manage the symptoms of endometriosis.
- Regulates monthly bleeding, which is good for those with irregular periods.
- Often improves acne.

What else do I need to know?

- If you run out of pills and are unable to see a doctor, speak to a pharmacist. Some pharmacists may be able to help if you show them your old pill packet.
- If you are breastfeeding, you can't use The Pill until your baby is six weeks old).
- If you are pregnant, you should stop taking The Pill immediately.
- If you do get pregnant while on The Pill, there is no evidence to suggest it will affect the pregnancy.
- Some studies show an increased risk of breast cancer in people taking The Pill.
- The Pill does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or blood borne viruses (BBVs), so you need to use a barrier form of protection such as condoms to reduce your risk.

Possible side effects include:

- Headaches
- Nausea or bloating
- Breast tenderness
- Acne (rarely)
- Mood changes

Most side effects settle within three months. If they continue and are impacting on your lifestyle, consult a doctor.

Is it right for me?

The Pill may not be the right choice if:

- you have difficulty remembering to take the pill at the same time every day
- you cannot have the hormone oestrogen
- you have medical reasons not to, including a history of deep vein thrombosis, blood clots, breast or liver cancer, some migraines and severe liver problems
- you are over 35 and smoke
- you have unusual vaginal bleeding.

You also may not be able to take The Pill if you:

- have high blood pressure or diabetes
- are overweight
- are taking certain other medications.

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For more information, support and advice visit www.fpt.org.au

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