The Pill
Combined Oral Contraceptive

What are the disadvantages?

You must remember to take it
The pill must be taken every day whether you have sexual intercourse on that day or not.

Bleeding
Some irregular bleeding may occur for a month or two after starting the pill. This does not mean that the pill is less effective as long as you have not missed pills. If the bleeding continues, keep taking your pill but check with your health care provider.

Skin changes
Dark patches on the face may occur.

Other side effects
The research does NOT show that the pill causes weight gain, headaches, breast tenderness, nausea or change in libido.

Serious side effects are rare
A large study has shown that pill users followed for 39 years were less likely to die than women who did not use the pill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deaths Per Million Women aged 15-44 from various causes, adapted from: Contraception, a Users Handbook 1998</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking Related Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to Pill Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Smoking greatly increases your risk of stroke or heart attack. If you don’t smoke you are unlikely to get these serious diseases.

Pill use can increase the risk of blood clots in the leg from 2 out of 10,000 women per year to 6 times that rate with some pills.

The following may suggest serious disease, so contact your doctor if you:
- Get sudden chest pain (may be a heart attack or a blood clot in the lung)
- Cough up blood (may be a blood clot in the lung)
- Become breathless (may be a blood clot in the lung)
- Have pain in the lower leg (may be a blood clot)
- Have a severe headache (may be a migraine or stroke)

The pill and cancer
Cancer of the breast – research suggests that even if there is any risk it is small. If you have someone in your family who has had breast cancer, discuss this with your healthcare provider.

Cancer of the cervix - certain types of wart virus are the main cause of cervical cancer. Women who have been on the pill for 5 or more years and who carry these types of wart virus have a slight increase in the risk of cervical cancer.

All women on the pill should have cervical smears as recommended by the New Zealand Cervical Screening Programme.

Cancer of the ovary is reduced by 50% and there is still a lower risk more than 30 years after stopping the pill. Cancer of the endometrium (lining of the womb) is reduced by 50% and there is still a lower risk more than 15 years after stopping the pill.

Does this pill protect you from sexually transmissible infections (STIs)?

No. You need to use condoms (and lubricant) as well to protect against STIs.


Family Planning provides confidential and non-judgemental sexual and reproductive health and education services. Please contact us for further information.

familyplanning.org.nz
What is it?
It is a pill women take every day to prevent pregnancy. The combined pill contains the hormones oestrogen and progestogen. These are like the hormones naturally produced by women’s ovaries.

How does it work?
The oestrogen and progestogen stop the eggs developing, so there is no egg released from the ovary.

How well does it work?
Typically 92% effective in preventing pregnancy (this means that 8 out of 100 women will get pregnant each year). If taken correctly, especially if the pill is taken continuously (“no-period option”), it can be more than 99% effective.

When do I take it?
There are several ways of taking the pill. Some women take 21 hormone pills and then 7 inactive non-hormone pills. This is the “period option”.

Other women take hormone pills continuously, every day. This is the “no-period option”. Some women take 3 packets of hormone pills together and then inactive pills so they have a period every 10 weeks.

Becoming pregnant after stopping
Your natural fertility will return as soon as you stop taking the pill.

Who should not use it?
• Women who have had a heart attack, stroke, or blood clot in their legs or lungs
• Women whose parents or brothers or sisters have had a blood clot in their legs or lungs
• Women over 35 who smoke
• Women who are overweight
• Some women who have migraines
• Women who are taking some medications, over-the-counter preparations or herbal remedies. Check with your doctor if you are taking regular medication
• There are other reasons why this pill may not be suitable for you, such as if you have your leg in plaster, or use a wheelchair.

Who can use it?
If you are healthy and do not smoke you can take the pill safely for many years.

What are the advantages?
It works
It can be 99% effective.

It is convenient
It is simple to take and doesn’t interfere with sexual intercourse.

Periods
You can choose to have periods (that are usually lighter and less crampy than your usual period) or to have no periods. Tell the doctor or nurse who is teaching you to take the pill the option you prefer.

Protection
The pill reduces your risk of cancer of the ovary and endometrium (lining of the womb) by 50%.

Acne
Some pills can improve acne.