

## Contraceptive Pills for Women



The most popular contraceptive in Australia is a pill called the 'combined' pill. It contains two hormones, which prevent a woman's body from producing an egg each month. Without this egg, a woman can't conceive.

### How do you take the pill?

The pill must be taken regularly to be effective. There are two different types of packs. One contains 21 pills, each containing hormones. You take one pill each day and when they're finished, you take a break for seven days then start a new pack. During this break, you bleed just like a normal period. For women who might forget to start again in seven days, try a 28 pill pack which keeps you in the routine of taking a pill each day. As well as 21 hormone pills, this pack includes seven 'dummy'\* sugar pills to take during the seven day break. Once the pack is finished, start another pack. Tell your doctor if you take other medications, vitamins or herbal remedies – some make the pill less effective.

### What health benefits does the pill have?

- May improve skin problems and premenstrual syndrome (mood swings and other symptoms some women experience before a period).
- May make periods lighter and less painful.
- Lowers the risk of cancer of the ovaries and cancer of the lining of the uterus.

### Can all women take the pill?

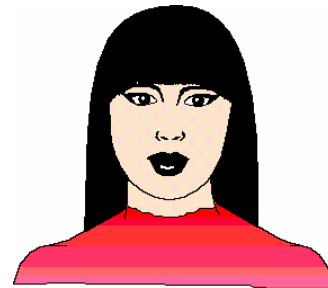
Not if you have a history of blood clots, stroke, heart disease, breast cancer or liver problems. Before taking the pill, tell your doctor if you are - smoke (smoking and taking the pill increases the risk of heart disease and stroke), have high blood pressure or diabetes, are over 35, get migraines

### What about side effects?

Although some women experience symptoms (eg irregular bleeding, weight gain, headaches, nausea, loss of libido, skin problems, mood swings, bloating or breast tenderness) these symptoms often improve after two or three months. Asking the doctor to suggest a different pill usually solves the problem. Sometimes the pill cause patches of darkened skin on the face – wearing a hat and sunscreen can prevent this.

### Does the pill cause breast cancer?

This is controversial. Most doctors agree that if there is an increased risk of developing breast cancer, it's very small, and should be balanced against the fact that it protects against other cancers.



### Does the pill harm future fertility?

No. But if you stop taking the pill, it sometimes takes a month or two before periods become regular again.

### Other choices

Ask about the mini-pill (with one hormone only) or other hormonal contraceptive methods which last for three months. For more information, ask your doctor, women's health service or family planning health clinic.

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