

## EMORY UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH & COUNSELING SERVICES

### ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE PILL INFORMATION SHEET

(adapted from *Contraceptive Technology 18<sup>th</sup> edition*, R. A. Hatcher et al.)

#### PILL SIDE EFFECTS & WARNING SIGNS

The three most common side effects of all oral contraceptive pills are: 1) nausea when you first start taking pills, 2) breakthrough bleeding (bleeding while on a medicated pill), and 3) breast tenderness. These symptoms usually subside within the first few months of oral contraceptive pill use. If any symptoms persist, contact your prescribing health care provider.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STARTING YOUR PILL

There are three common methods for starting your pill: 1) Sunday Start, 2) First Day of Menses, and 3) Quick Start. Follow instructions for the method indicated by your health care provider.

- Sunday Start*: Start your first pack the Sunday after your menses begins. This method cycles you so that you do not have a menses on a weekend. Remember, you **MUST** use a back-up method (such as condoms) during the first pack of pills.
- First Day of Menses*: Start your first pack with the first day of your menses. Not all birth control pill packs are set up to allow for this option. This method provides protection from pregnancy with the first pack of pill use.
- Quick Start*: Start your first pack on the same day of your office visit with your service provider. Remember, you **MUST** use a back-up method (such as condoms) during the first pack of pills because your first pack may not prevent ovulation during the first cycle of use.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONTINUING YOUR PILL

There are three methods for continuing and regulating your use of the pill: 1) Monthly Cycling – 21/7, 2) Shortened Interval, and 3) Extended Use. Follow instructions for the method indicated by your health care provider.

- Monthly Cycling*: Take the active pills consistently for three weeks followed by one week of placebo pills. You should expect predictable, monthly withdrawal bleeding (menses) during the week of placebo pills.
- Shortened Interval*: This method is similar to the *monthly cycling*; however, this method shortens the pill-free interval which suppresses ovarian activity more effectively and may shorten the menses.
- Extended Use*: This method involves taking active pills every day of each month. Discard the placebo pills and start your next pill the day after finishing the active pills of the last pill pack.

**If you have any of these rare but serious side effects, contact your health care provider immediately:**

**Abdominal Pain  
Chest Pain / Shortness of Breath  
Headache  
Eye Problems  
Severe Leg Pain**

#### TIPS

- Be consistent. Start each pack of pills on time. Take your pills every day at the same time. It does not matter what time of the day you take them, so long as you are consistent. Taking your pills even two hours late can start breakthrough bleeding, which may last a few hours or continue for a week or more and can result in decreased protection from pregnancy. Take your pills in the correct order.
- If you miss a pill, you may decrease their ability to prevent pregnancy. Take the missed pills as soon as you remember it, and take the next pill at your normally scheduled time. If you miss 2 pills, take 2 pills per day for 2 days. Whenever pills are missed, use a back-up method (such as condoms) until you finish that pack of pills.
- It is typical to have a light, short menses. Particularly with a "Sunday Start," it is typical to begin menses on Tuesday and end on Thursday.
- Some antibiotics may decrease pill effectiveness; it is safest to use condoms as backup contraception during the duration of the antibiotic use.
- Oral contraceptives are very effective at preventing pregnancy but do nothing at all to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Having a male partner wear a condom prevents many sexually transmitted infections.

For questions or concerns, call **404-727-7551** or  
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