

**D**eciding when or even if to become a parent is one of the most important choices you will make — for you, for your partner, and for your future. Maybe you are having sex and don't want to have a baby right away. Maybe you want to learn about how to space your children in the future. Maybe you're just curious about contraception. The point is, contraceptive methods help you plan when you will become a parent. This brochure tells you about one of the methods, so you can choose the one — or two — that seem right for you.

**T**hese choices matter to both men and women. Although most contraceptive methods are used by women, men are just as involved. Contraception seems to work best when a man and woman choose a method together and use it together!

***What you should know about:***

## **THE PILL**



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Public Health and Science  
Office of Population Affairs

*Updated 02/03*

*For additional copies, please contact:*

*Office of Population Affairs Clearinghouse*

*P.O. Box 30686, Bethesda, MD 20824 or*

*Phone: (301) 654-6190 Fax: (301) 215-773*

**What is it?** The pill is a prescription drug containing the hormones estrogen and progesterin.

**How does it work?** The pill works in several ways: It thickens cervical mucus which blocks the sperm; it prevents ovulation; and it prevents implantation.

**How is it used?** A pill is taken by mouth every day for 21 or 28 consecutive days of the menstrual cycle. It should be taken at the same time each day and should be taken on schedule, month after month.

**How well does it work?** The pill is 95% effective with typical use\* and 99.9% effective with perfect use.\*\* The pill is more likely to fail if pills are missed or taken late. Some medications also cause the pill to be less effective. A backup method such as a condom should be used during the first cycle on the pill, when taking some medications, if pills are missed, or if discontinuing use of the pill.

### **Does it reduce the risk for HIV/AIDS and STDs?**

No. It may actually increase the risk for chlamydia and cervicitis. A male latex condom should be used with the pill to reduce the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and STDs.

**What are its main advantages?** The pill is reversible. It does not interfere with sex. It is medically safe for most women. It regulates and lightens periods and decreases menstrual pain and PMS. It may improve acne. And it decreases the risk for ovarian and endometrial cancer.

**What are some possible problems?** The pill can cause nausea, weight gain, headaches, dizziness, breast tenderness, and break-through bleeding (spotting between periods). It can also cause more serious complications including depression and liver tumors. It may increase the risk of stroke, heart attack, blood clots, and high blood pressure for some women, especially women over 35 who smoke. It also may increase the risk for breast cancer and cervical cancer.

---

\* Typical Use Effectiveness—How well the method works for the average person.

\*\* Perfect Use Effectiveness—How well the method works when used correctly all of the time.