

# ME & Mom



## Combined Oral Contraceptives

Periodic Newsletter Produced by Mother Child Health Care Section in Primary Health Care Issue No. 2, June 2012

### What are Combined Oral Contraceptive?

- Pills that contain low doses of 2 hormones- a progestin and an estrogen-like the natural hormones in woman's body.
- Combined oral contraceptives (COCs) are also called "the Pill," and OCPs.

### Mechanism of action?

Work primarily by preventing the release of eggs from the ovaries (ovulation).

### How Effective?

When no pill-taking mistakes are made, less than 1 pregnancy per 100 women (3 per 1,000 women).

### Nearly all women can use COCs safely and effectively, including women who :

- Have or have not had children
- Are not married
- Are of any age, including adolescents and Women over 40 years old
- Have just had an abortion or miscarriage
- Smoke cigarettes-if under 35 years old
- Have anemia now or had in the past
- Have varicose veins
- Are infected with HIV, whether or not on antiretroviral therapy

### Women can begin using COCs:

- Without a pelvic examination
- Without any blood tests or other routine laboratory tests
- Without cervical cancer screening
- Without a breast examination

**Even when a woman is not having monthly bleeding at the time, if it is reasonably certain she is not pregnant**

### How to Use combined oral contraceptives?

- Take one pill each day, start first day cycle or within 5 days.
- After you takes the last pill from one pack, you should wait 7 days- no more-and then take the first pill from the next pack.





## Who Can NOT Use Combined Oral Contraceptive?

- Not breastfeeding and less than 3 weeks since giving birth
- Primarily breastfeeding between 6 weeks and 6 months since giving birth
- Age 35 or older and smokes fewer than 15 cigarettes a day
- High blood pressure (140 -159 mm Hg \ 90 - 99 mm Hg)
- History of jaundice while using COCs in the past.
- Gall bladder disease (current or medically treated)
- Age 35 or older and has migraine headaches without aura
- Younger than age 35 and has migraine headaches without aura that have developed or have gotten worse while using COCs
- Had breast cancer more than 5 years ago, and it has not returned
- Diabetes for more than 20 years or damage to arteries, vision, kidneys, or nervous system caused by diabetes
- Taking barbiturates, carbamazepine, oxcarbazepine, phenytoin, primidone, topiramate, rifampicin, rifabutin, ritonavir inhibitors.

## Correcting Misunderstandings



### Combined oral contraceptives:

- Do not build up in a woman's body. Women do not need a "rest" from taking COCs.
- Must be taken every day, whether or not a woman has sex that day.
- Do not make women infertile.
- Do not cause birth defects or multiple births.
- Do not change women's sexual behavior.
- Do not collect in the stomach. Instead, the pill dissolves each day.

## Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP)

Emergency contraception, sometimes referred to as the "morning-after" pill, is birth control that women can use to prevent pregnancy after known or suspected failure of contraception or unprotected intercourse, including sexual assault.

### When to Take Them?

- As soon as possible after unprotected sex.
- The sooner ECPs are taken after unprotected sex, the better they prevent pregnancy.

- Can prevent pregnancy when taken any time up to 5 days after unprotected sex.

### Dosing information

- This can be managed with 4 tablets of Nordett (0.03) followed by another 4 after 12 hours.
- Antiemetic can be taken if needed.

## Extended and Continuous Use of COC Combined Oral Contraceptives

Some COC users do not follow the usual cycle of 3 weeks taking hormonal pills followed by one week without hormones. Some women take hormonal pills for 12 weeks without a break, followed by one week of nonhormonal pills (or no pills). This is extended use. Other women take hormonal pills without any breaks at all. This is continuous use. Monophasic pills are recommended for such use.

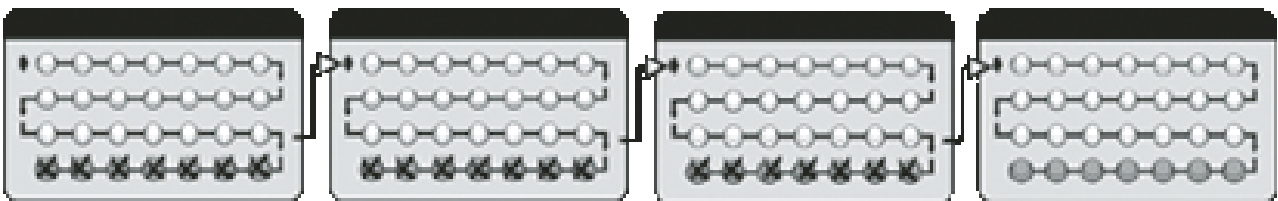
### Benefits of Extended and Continuous Use :

- Women have vaginal bleeding only 4 times a year or not at all.
- Reduces how often some women suffer headaches, premenstrual syndrome, mood changes, and heavy or painful bleeding during the week without hormonal pills.

### Disadvantages of Extended and Continuous Use :

- Irregular bleeding may last as long as the first 6 months of use - especially among women who have never before used COCs.
- More supplies needed - 15 to 17 packs every year instead of 13.

### Extended Use Instructions :



- Skip the last week of pills (without hormones) in 3 packs in a row. (21-day users skip the 7-day waits between the first 3 packs.) No backup method is needed during this time.
- Take all 4 weeks of pills in the 4th pack. (21-day users take all 3 weeks of pills in the 4th pack.) Expect some bleeding during this 4th week.
- Start the next pack of pills the day after taking the last pill in the 4th pack. (21-day users wait 7 days before starting the next pack.)

### Continuous Use Instructions :

Take one hormonal pill every day for as long as she wishes to use COCs. If bothersome irregular bleeding occurs, a woman can stop taking pills for 3 or 4 days and then start taking hormonal pills continuously again.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q :** How long does it take to become pregnant after stopping OCPs?

**A :** No delay to return of a woman's fertility after she stops taking them.

**Q :** Do OCPs cause abortion?

**A :** No. Research on COCs finds that they do not disrupt an existing pregnancy.

**Q :** Will the fetus be harmed if a woman accidentally takes OCPs while she is pregnant?

**A :** No. Good evidence shows that there will no

harm to the fetus if a woman becomes pregnant while taking OCPs.

**Q :** Do COCs cause women to gain or lose a lot of weight?

**A :** No. Most women do not gain or lose weight due to COCs.

**Q :** Do COCs change women's mood or sex drive?

**A :** Generally, no. Some women using COCs report these complaints

## Managing Missing Pills

**Always take a pill as soon as you remember, and continue taking pills, one each day.**

<p><b>Missed 1 or 2 pills Started new pack 1 or 2 days late ?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a hormonal pill as soon as possible .</li> <li>• Little or no risk of pregnancy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Missed pills 3 or more days in a row in the first or second week? Started new pack 3 or more days late?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a hormonal pill as soon as possible .</li> <li>• Use a backup method for the next 7 days.</li> <li>• Also, if she had sex in the past 5 days, can consider Emergency Contraceptive Pills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Missed 3 or more pills in the third week?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a hormonal pill as soon as possible .</li> <li>• Finish all hormonal pills in the pack.</li> <li>• Start a new pack the next day.</li> <li>• Use a backup method for the next 7 days.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Severe vomiting or diarrhea</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If she vomits within 2 hour after taking a pill, she should take another pill from her pack soon as possible, then keep taking pills as usual.</li> <li>• If she has vomiting or diarrhea for more than 2 days, follow instructions for 1 or 2 missed pills, above.</li> </ul>

*Edited by:*

**Dr. Sumaya Saud Al-Doseri**  
 Consultant Family Physician  
 Member of Post Natal & Family  
 Planning Committee  
[Sdoseri1@health.gov.bh](mailto:Sdoseri1@health.gov.bh)

*Reviewed by:*

**Dr. Fatima Mohammed Siddiq Al-Alawi**  
 Consultant Family Physician  
 Head of Post Natal & Family  
 Planning Committee  
[fwlawi2@health.gov.bh](mailto:fwlawi2@health.gov.bh)

**For our publications:** [www.moh.gov.bh](http://www.moh.gov.bh)

P.O Box: 12, Manama - Kingdom of Bahrain Tel: 17286075, Fax: 17729043