

Missed a Birth Control Pill? Here's what to do.

Live Well to
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Remembering to take your birth control pill every day can be hard, but it's essential if you want to maintain consistent contraceptive protection. When pills are taken off-schedule, your risk of an unplanned pregnancy increases.

That said, sometimes mistakes happen and a pill is forgotten or a pack started late. The following instructions will help you learn how to get back on track. If you're still not sure what to do after reviewing these instructions, continue to take one pill each day — and rely on a back up method (like condoms) or abstain from sexual behaviors that may put you at risk for pregnancy until you have successfully taken a pill a day for 7 consecutive days.

If you find that you frequently take your pills off-schedule, talk with a one of our clinicians about finding a more convenient, effective method of birth control for you.

For missed *combination oral contraceptive pills*

If you missed 1 hormonal pill (by 24–48 hours) or if you are simply late taking 1 pill (for less than 24 hours), you should:

- Take the late or missed pill as soon as possible.
- Continue taking the remaining pills at the usual time (even if it means taking two pills on the same day).
- No additional contraceptive protection needed.
- Emergency contraception is not usually needed but can be considered if hormonal pills were missed earlier in the cycle or in the last week of the previous cycle.

If you missed 2 or more consecutive hormonal pills (more than 48 hours have passed since you took a pill), you should:

- Take the most recent missed pill as soon as possible (discarding any other missed pills)
- Continue taking your pills on schedule (even if it means taking a second pill on the day you remembered to get back on track).
- Use back-up contraception (e.g., condoms) or avoid sexual intercourse until you have taken the hormonal pills for 7 consecutive days.
- If the pills you missed were in the last week of hormonal pills (e.g., days 15–21 for 28-day pill packs):
 - Omit the hormone-free interval by finishing the hormone pills in the current pack and starting a new pack the next day.



First, take a deep breath . . . then read this information.

- If you are unable to start a new pack immediately, use back-up contraception (e.g., condoms) or avoid sexual intercourse until hormonal pills from a new pack have been taken for 7 consecutive days.
- Emergency contraception should be considered if hormonal pills were missed during the first week and unprotected sexual intercourse occurred in the previous 5 days. It may also be considered at other times if appropriate.

For missed *progestin-only pills* (“mini pills”)

If you get menstrual periods (even if you are breastfeeding) AND you have missed 1 or more pills by more than 3 hours, you should:

- Take 1 pill as soon as possible.
- Continue taking pills on schedule, 1 each day.
- Abstain from behaviors that may put you at risk for pregnancy or use back-up contraception (e.g., condoms) for the next 2 days.
- Emergency contraception should be considered if— within the past 5 days— you have engaged in behavior that put you at risk for pregnancy.

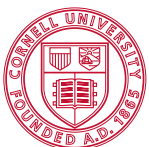
If you are breastfeeding and aren't getting menstrual periods AND you missed 1 or more pills by more than 3 hours:

- Take 1 pill as soon as possible.
- Continue taking 1 pill each day as usual.

If you gave birth fewer than six months ago:

- No additional contraceptive protection is needed at this time.

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Reminder: for any kind of oral contraceptive pills

If you are starting oral contraceptive pills for the first time, or are starting them again after not using them in the prior month, your pills will not work for pregnancy protection until you have taken a pill a day for 7 consecutive days.

If you begin your pill pack within the first 5 days of your normal period, they will be effective immediately.

If you are unsure which instructions pertain to your oral contraceptive pills, consider one of the following options:

- Review the package insert from your contraceptive pills.
- Consult our website *health.cornell.edu* [search “Missed Pill”].
- Call us 607-255-5155 and ask to consult with one of our nurses.

More information

The sexual health nurses at Cornell Health can talk with you about any concerns you may have about missed pills, other birth control methods, reducing risks of STIs and/or testing. These consultations are free.

To schedule an appointment, you may either go online to myCornellHealth or call 607-255-5155.



Emergency Contraception (EC)

Consider EC whenever you miss 2 or more active pills in a row OR if you begin a new pill pack 2 or more days late AND you have had unprotected sexual activity that would put you at risk for pregnancy during the 5 days prior.

- EC is available **with or without a prescription** at most pharmacies, including the one at Cornell Health.
- EC is most **effective when taken very soon** after unprotected intercourse. Non-prescription EC is available at most pharmacies (you may need to ask the pharmacist for it though).
- The prescription-only EC typically works better (than non-prescription EC) for **individuals with a higher Body Mass Index (BMI)** AND those for whom **it has been 4 or more days** since unprotected sex. Please call Cornell Health and speak with a nurse to find out how you can easily obtain a prescription for EC.

Please see Cornell Health’s “Emergency Contraception” fact sheet for more details.

For the full recommendations and an illustrated flow chart depicting the content represented in this fact sheet, see the U.S. Selected Practice Recommendations for Contraceptive Use, 2013 (cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6205.pdf)

This fact sheet is not intended to replace package inserts for your contraceptive pills. Please refer to the package insert for more comprehensive information.

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