



Is it necessary to take your birth control pill at the same time every day?

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If you don't take your pill at the same time each day, it won't be as effective in preventing pregnancy. You may have heard something along these lines if you are taking or have ever taken the birth control pill. However, is this "expert" tip actually true?

The answer can be yes or no. But how do you know which answer applies to you? Well, it depends on what kind of pill you take: combination or progestin-only (also called the minipill). It also depends on the level of effectiveness you want to achieve.

Combination pill

The combination pill is the most common, and it contains both estrogen and progestin. This type works by preventing eggs from being released and helping block sperm, therefore keeping you safe from unplanned pregnancy. When it comes to the combination pill, you do NOT have to take it at the exact same time every day for it to be effective, but the effectiveness decreases if you do not.

Progestin-only pill

As the name states, the progestin-only pill contains just one of the hormones found in the combination pill. It does not contain estrogen (like the combination pill does). The minipill simply works to prevent sperm from reaching an egg, but it does not usually prevent ovulation as the combination pill does. If you are taking the minipill, then you ARE required to take it at roughly the same time each day. You only have about a three-hour window for optimal effectiveness because of the way the pill works.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the birth control pill is depends directly upon how well you use it. If you manage “perfect use” of the pill, then it could be up to 99% effective. This entails taking the pill at the same time each day and making sure you don’t use other medications that may interfere with it.

However, “perfect use” is nearly impossible for most. You are human, so you make mistakes, and sometimes forget. Therefore, you are most likely achieving “typical use” of the pill, which decreases effectiveness to a certain degree (usually estimated between 91% and 93%).

The primary reason that you may be told to take the combination pill at the same each day is to help you form the good habit of taking it, whereas for the minipill, timing matters. Birth control is only effective when used correctly, and if you forget to take one or two pills, you will be at risk of pregnancy.



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Sources:

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