CHOICES:

"The Pill" COMBINED ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE

WHAT ARE COMBINED BIRTH CONTROL PILLS?

Combined birth control pills contain two hormones, an estrogen and a progestin. They work by stopping ovulation (release of an egg) and by making the lining of the uterus thinner. Among typical couples who initiate use of combined pills about 5% will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. This is because sometimes pills are not used correctly. If pills are used consistently and correctly, just one in 1,000 women will become pregnant. Use a backup contraceptive for the first 7 days of your first pack of pills. You do **not** need to use a backup method during the hormone-free days of your pill pack. *Complete information about this contraceptive is available from your clinician or the package insert accompanying the specific pill brand you are taking.*

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

- Pills decrease a woman's risk for cancer of the ovary and cancer of the lining of the uterus (endometrial cancer). They also lower your chances of having benign breast masses (breast masses which are NOT cancer), ovarian cysts, ectopic pregnancy, and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).
- Pills decrease women's menstrual cramps and pain.
- They reduce menstrual blood loss and a woman's risk for anemia.
- Acne often improves, and hair growth on the face is reduced.
- Many women enjoy sex more when on pills because they know they are less likely to get pregnant.
- Some clinicians will provide 3 to 6 months of pills without a pelvic exam.
- You can control the cycle so as not to have your period during certain times (honeymoon, exams, etc.).
- You can decrease the number of cycles over time (taking 3 series of 21 active pills followed by a pill-free interval of 4 days).

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES?

- Pills do not protect you from HIV or other infections. Use a condom if you may be at risk.
- You have to remember to take the pill every day.
- You may have nausea and/or spotting mostly during the first few cycles on pills.
- Pills tend to make periods very short and scanty.
- You may see no blood at all. Most women like this when they understand it is normal.
- Taking the pill may cause headaches, depression, anxiety, fatigue, mood changes, or decreased enjoyment of sex in some women.
- A backup contraceptive is required for 2 weeks if you have any question about how many pills you have missed and whether a backup is necessary.
- Serious complications like blood clots may occur but are very rare.
- Pills can be quite expensive and require a prescription.
- Pills may promote growth of breast cancer but probably do not cause breast cancer. They may lead to higher rates of one type of cervical cancer (adenocarcinoma of the cervix).
- After stopping pills, you may not get your period for 1-3 months, although this situation is rare.

WHERE CAN I GET PILLS?

- In the United States you need a prescription. You can get pills from your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse midwife, health department, or family planning clinic.

WHAT IF I HAVE SEX AND DON'T USE BIRTH CONTROL?

Did you know that for 72 hours after sex, you can take emergency contraceptive pills to avoid becoming pregnant? AND for 5 to 7 days after sex, you can have an IUD put in, so you won't become pregnant? Not all clinicians know about this. If you want more information or would like the phone numbers of clinicians near you that prescribe emergency birth control, call the toll-free number: (1-888) NOT-2-LATE or (1-800) 584-9911. Some of these sources of help are free. PLAN B is the emergency contraceptive pill that causes the least nausea, the least vomiting, and has the lowest failure rate.

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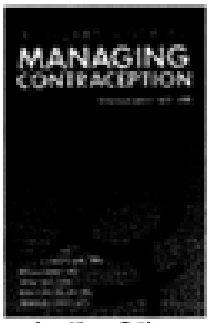

You can order both of these guides, as well as other Bridging the Gap publications, by calling (404)-373-0530.

Source: Bridging the Gap Foundation, Tiger, GA. Web: www.managingcontracepton.com.