

# Combined Oral Contraceptives (COCs)

## What Are They?

COCs are tablets containing the hormones estrogen and progestin. A woman takes one tablet daily to prevent pregnancy.

## How Effective Are They?

If 100 young women used COCs for one year, typically eight of them would become pregnant. If taken consistently every day, COCs are highly effective (one pregnancy among 1,000 young women). **There is a higher failure rate for adolescents than all other ages, since adolescents have trouble remembering to take pills regularly.**

## How Do COCs Work?

COCs work by preventing the release of the egg from the ovary. Without an egg to be fertilized, a woman cannot become pregnant.

## Advantages

- \* Are safe, effective, and easy to use.
- \* Can be used before the onset of menses.
- \* May lead to lighter, regular periods with less cramping.
- \* Can become pregnant after stopping the pill.
- \* Do not interfere with sex.
- \* May be beneficial for adolescents who have irregular or heavy periods, menstrual cramps, or acne.
- \* Decrease risk of cancer of the female reproductive organs.

## Disadvantages

- \* Have some side effects.
- \* Must be taken every day.
- \* Do not protect against STIs/HIV.

## Possible Side Effects

Most adolescents experience no side effects. Occasionally, an adolescent may experience:

- \* Nausea
- \* Weight gain
- \* Breast tenderness
- \* Headaches or dizziness
- \* Unexpected bleeding or spotting
- \* Depression

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## CLIENT INSTRUCTIONS

Show the client the pill packet and explain the following:

### How to Use the Pills

- \* Take first pill on the first day of period or any of the next four days.
- \* Take one pill every day, at the same time of day. **Keep pills in an easy to remember place, such as near where you brush your teeth every night.**
- \* 28-day packet: Upon finishing a packet, begin a new one the following day.
- \* 21-day packet: Upon finishing a packet, wait seven days and then begin a new one. **To remember when to start up again, mark it on a calendar.**

### Missed Pills – What to Do

- \* Missed pills may result in pregnancy.
- \* If one pill is missed, take it as soon as you remember. Take the next pill at the regular time.
- \* If two pills are missed, take two pills immediately, then take two pills the next day and use a backup method for a week. Finish the packet normally.
- \* If more than two pills are missed, throw away the packet and start a new one, and use a backup method for the next week.

### Possible Side Effects

- \* Most adolescent women experience no side effects.
- \* Occasionally, adolescents may experience side effects (explain possible side effects, see front of card).

### The Pill Does Not Protect Against STIs/HIV

To protect against STIs/HIV and provide further protection against pregnancy, use a condom during every act of intercourse.

### Reasons to Return to Provider

- \* Chest pain or shortness of breath
- \* Onset of severe headaches (with blurred vision)
- \* Anytime there is a problem.
- \* Either partner thinks s/he may have been exposed to a STI.
- \* A resupply of COCs or condoms is needed (never run out completely before returning).

Have the Client Repeat this Information Back to You.