



## Chew on This

**A**re you one of the millions of women who has a hard time swallowing pills? Good news: The FDA approved Femcon Fe, the first chewable birth control pill. Femcon Fe works like other oral contraceptives to prevent pregnancy, but comes with the added benefit of being a spearmint-flavored chewable pill. The once-a-day pill is the munchy version of Ovcon 35, which has been on the market for 30 years. Femcon Fe has the same risks associated with other low-dose pills on the market, and it comes in 28-day packs.

"This new pill is not a revolutionary change, but clearly an evolutionary change," says Lee Shulman, M.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University.

"There are women who have difficulty swallowing pills, and any time you can remove a barrier, it represents an important step in contraception."

—Nia Regina Davis

## Driving While Sleep?

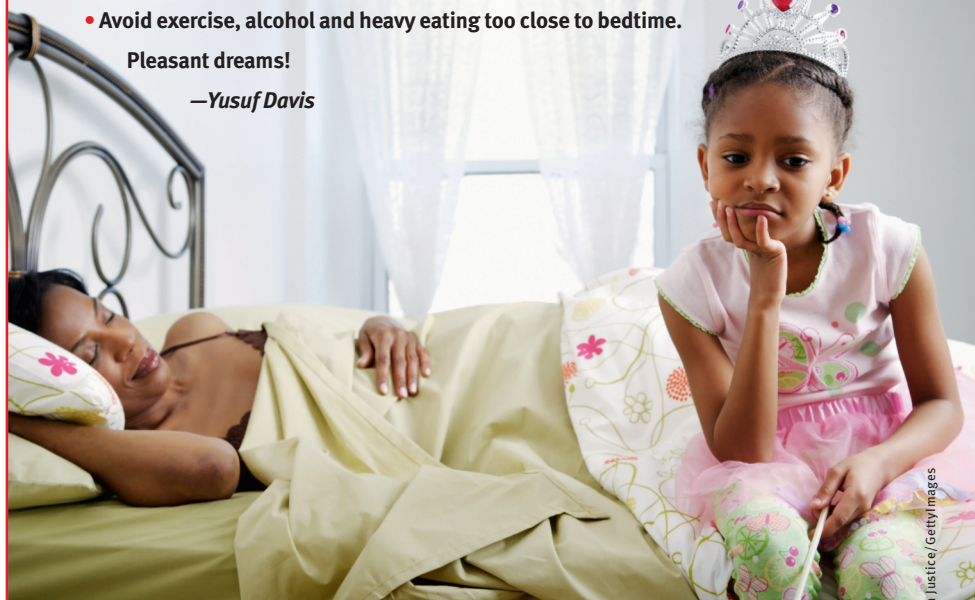
**A** recent National Sleep Foundation (NSF) survey revealed that women are more likely than men to have difficulty falling and staying asleep. That problem is compounded by the hormonal fluctuations associated with menstrual cycles and menopause. So when getting a good night's sleep the natural way becomes a nightmare, many women turn to sleep aids. But despite their benefits, sleeping pills are potentially addictive and harmful, NSF experts say. Therefore sleeping pills should be used only as a temporary solution and under the guidance of a physician.

Not all sleep aids work alike and choosing among the dizzying array of options and side effects can make you, well, lose sleep. And only a tiny percentage of sleep aid users experience the extremely abnormal behavior from news reports, such as cooking or driving while apparently asleep. But sound sleep is too vital to be left to drugs, so the NSF recommends these tips:

- Maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule, including weekends.
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine—soaking in a hot bath, reading a book or listening to soothing music.
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool.
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.
- Avoid exercise, alcohol and heavy eating too close to bedtime.

Pleasant dreams!

—Yusuf Davis



**AIDS in Your Pocket** A research team recently found people living with HIV can add an extra 24 years to their lives, while finding their pockets lighter to the tune of \$618,900. It seems that life-extending drugs, first introduced in 1996, come with both huge benefits and heavy costs. **Monthly prescription bills can run from \$2,100 to \$4,700 and are expected to increase.** There is a cost-cutting option: Phill Wilson, founder and executive director of the Black AIDS Institute, says the best way to combat this trend is to do a better job of preventing people from getting infected. "We must invest in prevention and make sure people get to treatment early," he says. —A.C. Gillam