

Fact Sheet

Progestogen-only pill (mini pill)



What is the Progestogen-only pill (POP)

The Progestogen-only pill (POP), sometimes called the 'mini pill', is a form of oral contraception that you take every day at the same time to prevent pregnancy. It contains a very small amount of only one hormone, progestogen. This pill may be useful for women who cannot use the combined oral contraceptive pill (the Pill) which contains oestrogen. Progestogen is similar to the natural hormone, progesterone, which women produce in their ovaries.



How does it work?

It works by making the mucus at the entrance to the uterus (womb) thicker, so that sperm cannot get through to meet an egg.

In some women it stops the release of an egg each month.

How well does it work?

When used correctly, the POP is around 99% effective at preventing pregnancy which means that about one woman in every 100 will become pregnant in a year if it is used perfectly. But in real life it is not quite as effective as the Pill because it requires careful, on time pill taking. If 100 women were to use the POP for a year, between one and nine may become pregnant depending on how well it is taken.

Who can take the POP?

Most women can take the POP. It is particularly useful for women who can't use the Pill because of the oestrogen in it but want to take a daily pill. Breastfeeding women, women with particular types of migraine headaches, women who have had, or have a risk of blood clots, and women who are over 35 years old and smoke may all find the POP suits them.

Who should not take the POP?

You may not be able to take it if:

- you have, or have had, breast cancer
- you have active viral hepatitis
- you have severe liver disease
- you are taking other medications such as some anti-epileptic drugs, which reduce the effectiveness of the POP

What are the advantages of taking the POP?

- It is an effective form of contraception if taken at the same time every day
- It is a low dose form of contraception
- It doesn't interfere with sex
- You can easily stop taking it if you choose to
- It can be used by women who are breastfeeding or who can't use oestrogen
- Once you stop taking the POP, your fertility returns to your normal level immediately

What are the disadvantages of taking the POP?

It does not protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs), but you can use condoms at the same time as the POP to prevent STIs.

Periods will often change:

- approximately 2 in 10 women have no vaginal bleeding
- approximately 4 in 10 women have regular vaginal bleeding
- approximately 4 in 10 women have irregular vaginal bleeding

You must remember to take it at the same time every day or it won't work

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How do I get the POP?

You need to go to a doctor or Family Planning clinic to get a script for the POP. In Family Planning clinics the doctor or nurse will ask you questions about your health and will advise you how to take the POP. You can then buy your pills from a pharmacy or a Family Planning clinic. You should have a check up every 12 months.

How do you take the POP?

You must take the POP every day without a break, at the same time each day. It always comes in a 28-day pack. Every pill is a hormone (progestogen) pill and you do not have a break between packs. There are no sugar pills in a POP pack.

When do I start the POP?

Talk to your doctor or nurse about when to start taking the POP.

You should take the POP at the same time every day. Take your first pill at the time that you intend to take it each day. You may want to set a reminder on your phone or put the POP with your toothbrush to help you remember to take it.

What if I miss a POP?

If you are more than three hours late taking the POP you will not be covered for contraception

- take the pill as soon as possible
- take the next pill at the usual time and continue taking your pills as usual
- the POP will not be effective until taken for 48 hours (that is, the next 3 pills are taken properly). A barrier method such as a condom should be used, or abstain from sex

If you had sex while you were not protected because you missed pills and you did not use any other contraception you may be at risk of pregnancy. You should consider the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP), available from a pharmacy without a prescription. Contact your doctor or a Family Planning Centre for further advice.

You can ring the Family Planning NSW Talkline on 1300 658 886.

What if I am vomiting?

If you vomit within two hours of taking the POP you should take another pill straight away. If you keep vomiting (or have severe diarrhoea) then you should follow the advice for when you miss a pill.

What if I am taking other medicines?

Some medications or herbal remedies may stop the POP working. If you are taking another medication, ask your doctor or nurse about this. If the doctor tells you that you are not fully protected use other contraception as well as the POP while you are taking the medication.

Possible side effects

There are very few side effects with the POP. The most likely side effect is irregular bleeding.

There is no good evidence to show that the POP causes weight gain or depression although it may cause mood changes. Some women may experience headaches, bloating or skin changes. Talk to your doctor if you develop any unwanted side-effects since it may be helpful to change the pill type.

Medical check ups

All women who have ever been sexually active should have a routine Pap test every two years from the age of 18, or two years after starting having sex (whichever is later).

For further information

- Contact the Family Planning NSW Talkline on 1300 658 886 or go to www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline
- NRS (for deaf) 133 677
- Or visit your nearest Family Planning clinic

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