

# The Progestogen Only Pill

## Mini-pill or POP

A service provided by

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals



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## **How does the progestogen only pill (POP) work?**

The progestogen only pill mainly works by thickening the mucus you produce from your cervix. This makes it more difficult for sperm to get to the egg. It can also sometimes stop your ovaries from producing an egg (ovulation).

## **How effective is the pill?**

The effectiveness of the pill depends on the woman taking it. At best it is over 98% effective (when no pills are missed). However failure rates can be much higher (9-15%) if women do not remember to take their pill properly.

**Missed pills can lead to pregnancy.**

## **Advantages of the POP**

- It doesn't interfere with sex.
- You can use it whilst you are breastfeeding.
- It is useful if you cannot take oestrogen (the hormone contained in the combined oral contraceptive)
- Can be used at any age even if you smoke and are over 35 years of age.
- It may help with premenstrual symptoms and painful periods.

## **Disadvantages of the POP**

- You have to remember to take your pill at the same time every day.
- Your periods may become irregular or even stop altogether on the POP, this is not dangerous but if you miss a period you need to check that you are not pregnant by coming to clinic for a pregnancy test.
- You may get some temporary side effects, such as spotty skin, breast tenderness and mood changes, though these should stop within a few months.
- Some women can develop small cysts on their ovaries whilst taking the POP, these are usually not dangerous and often do not cause any symptoms. Occasionally, if they become large, they may cause some lower abdominal pain. If you have any symptoms like this please arrange to see the clinic doctor.
- Research about the risk of breast cancer, cervical cancer and hormonal contraception is complex and contradictory. Research suggests that users of all hormonal contraception may have a small increase in risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to non-users.

## **How to take the progestogen only pill**

- You can start the pill at anytime in your menstrual cycle if you are sure you are not pregnant.
- If you start on the first day of your period you are protected from pregnancy straightaway.
- If you start your pill at any other time you will need to use condoms for the first 2 days.
- Take one pill every day until you finish the packet (following the arrows on the pack).

- You must take the pill at the same time everyday or within 3 hours of the usual time that you take it (12 hours for a 75mcg Desogestrel pill such as Cerelle or Cerazette, Zelleta or Feanolla) so you should choose a time to take the pill when you are most likely to remember it.
- When you come to the end of the packet go straight on to the next packet on the next day – **do not have a break from your pill.**
- This means that you will continue to take your pill during your period.

### **What shall I do if I forget a pill?**

- If you forget a pill, take it as soon as possible.
  - If you are less than 3 hours late, (12 hours for a 75mcg Desogestrel pill such as Cerelle or Cerazette, Zelleta or Feanolla), there is no need to use extra protection.
  - If you are more than 3 hours late, (12 hours for a 75mcg Desogestrel pill such as Cerelle or Cerazette, Zelleta or Feanolla), you must use extra protection (condoms) for the next 2 days.
- If you have unprotected sex after forgetting a pill then telephone the clinic for advice, you may need emergency contraception.

### **Can anyone use the POP?**

The POP is not suitable for every woman. Please tell the nurse or doctor about any illnesses that you have had.

The following conditions may mean that the POP is not suitable for you:

- You think you may be pregnant
- You do not want your periods to change

- You have now or have had in the past:
  - Breast cancer
  - Unexplained vaginal bleeding (between your periods or after sex)
  - A heart attack or stroke (serious arterial disease)
  - Active liver disease
  - Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

### **What makes the pill less effective?**

- Forgetting pills - if you do not take your POP every day you are at risk of pregnancy.
- Some medicines especially tablets for Epilepsy, TB, HIV and also St John's Wort will interfere with the pill. (Always check with the doctor who prescribes them).
- Vomiting or diarrhoea - if you vomit within 3 hours of taking the pill or have very severe diarrhoea, continue taking the pill as usual but use extra protection (condoms) whilst you are ill and for 2 days after you feel better.

### **I've missed my period - am I pregnant?**

If you miss a period whilst on the POP do not worry as this is a common occurrence. If you have taken all your pills correctly you are probably not pregnant so carry on taking your pill as usual. If you have just recently started the POP or this is the first time you have ever missed a period whilst taking the POP then it is a good idea to arrange an appointment at clinic for a pregnancy test.

## **I have just had a baby - when can I start the POP?**

The POP can be started any time after the birth. If you start the POP after day 21 then you will need to use condoms for 2 days.

## **Can I take the POP after a miscarriage or abortion?**

Yes, you can start the POP the very next day and you will be protected straight away.

## **How often do I need to see a doctor or nurse?**

When you first start the POP you will usually be given a 3 month supply to see how it suits you. After that you should go back to clinic to get new supplies. Usually you will need to visit clinic 1-2 times a year for more supplies.

## **Does the POP protect me from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?**

No, the POP only protects you from pregnancy. If you want to avoid STIs including chlamydia, gonorrhoea and HIV, it is important to use condoms as well as the pill.

**Condoms are available free from the Sexual Health Clinic.**

# Sexual Health Sheffield

Visit Sexual Health Sheffield's website for opening times

- [www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk](http://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk)
- **0114 226 8888**



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