



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES
HEALTH & WELLNESS CENTER

Progestin Only Birth Control Pills

What are progestin-only oral contraceptives? Progestin-Only Pills (POPs), commonly called "mini-pills," are different from combined birth control pills in that they contain only one hormone (progestin) instead of two (progestin and estrogen).

How does the progestin-only pill work? POPs may prevent pregnancy in several ways. They thicken the cervical mucus making it harder for sperm to reach and fertilize the egg. Like combined pills, they can prevent a woman's body from releasing an egg during her monthly menstrual cycle. However, ovulation may not be consistently suppressed on POPs and 40 % of women continue to ovulate. Five percent of women using POPs will have an unintended pregnancy within the first year of typical use. Perfect use rate is 0.5%. The chance of becoming pregnant increases with missed pills. While the overall risk of ectopic (tubal) pregnancy is lowered by this method, any pregnancy that does occur is more likely to be ectopic. Finally, POPs will not prevent functional ovarian cysts as well as the combination oral contraceptive.

Why would a woman choose a progestin-only pill? POPs do not contain estrogen. Therefore they can be used by women who cannot or should not use combined oral contraceptives, such as women with a history of blood clots, migraine headaches with aura, high blood pressure, or cigarette smokers over the age of 35. Women who are breast-feeding can use POPs for contraception.. POPs have a number of non-contraceptive benefits. They decrease menstrual blood flow and cramping, reduce risk of anemia and endometrial cancer, and reduce risk of pelvic inflammatory infection. They do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).

How are the progestin-only pills taken? Start the pills during the first five days of your period or on any day you are reasonably sure that you are not pregnant. Use a backup method such as condoms for the first 48 hours. The pill is taken every day at the same time. There are NO placebo or "sugar" pills. It is important to take the progestin-only pills at the same time every day. **Varying the time by even a few hours greatly increases the risk of becoming pregnant. If a pill is more than three hours late use a back-up method or abstain for the next 48 hours.**

What if pills are missed or taken late? If you are three or more hours late or you miss one POPs; take the missed pill as soon as you remember that you missed it; then go back to taking your POPs at your regular time. Be sure to use a backup method (such as condoms) every time you have sex for the next 48 hours. If you miss two or more POP's in a row; restart your POP's right away and take two pills a day for two days. Use a backup method for the next seven days. If your period does not begin in 4-6 weeks, pregnancy testing is advised.

If you have missed pills or have been three or more hours late taking the POP and had intercourse without a back-up method you may choose to use an emergency contraceptive. Emergency contraception is available at pharmacies without a prescription.

What are the side effects? The most common side effect is irregular bleeding or spotting. In most cases, the bleeding is not serious and will stop in less than eight days. If you have a fever, abdominal pain or heavy bleeding, contact your health care provider. Less common side effects include headache, nausea, acne, weight gain or loss, and breast tenderness. If you have a severe headache or worsening of a migraine, contact your provider.

What medications can affect progestin only pills? Some medications can make the progestin only pill less effective, which may result in pregnancy. Check with your health care provider or pharmacist if you are using any of the following drugs.

- *Griseofulvin
- * St. John's Wort
- *Some Barbituates
- * Rifampin
- *Ketoconazole
- *Some HIV medications