

Progestin-Only Pill



What is the progestin-only pill (POP)?

POP is a type of birth control pill that contains only one hormone (progestin). Other birth control pills contain two hormones (estrogen and progestin). POP prevents pregnancy by:

- decreasing the amount of cervical mucus, and making it thicker which slows the movement of the sperm, making it harder to get to the egg
- slowing down the egg in the fallopian tube
- sometimes stopping an egg from being released (about half the time)

How well does POP work?

- If no method of birth control is used, there's about an **85%** chance of getting pregnant after 1 year of having sex.
- With **perfect use** (you follow the exact directions all the time) POP is **99.7 %** effective.
- With **typical use** (not following the exact directions) POP is **91%** effective.
- You are more likely to get pregnant if you take your pill **over 3 hours late**.
- Think about getting **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if birth control wasn't used or you forgot to take your pill.
- POP doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (anal, oral, vaginal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.

How do I start taking POP?

You need a prescription from your health care provider. POP comes as a 28-day pack (there are hormones in all 28 pills). There are no hormone-free pills. **Take one pill at the same time every day**. There are different ways to start the first package.

If you start POP:

- on day 1 to 5 of your period, it works right away to prevent pregnancy
- on any other day, you need to use a backup form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) for 48 hours

Talk to your health care provider if you:

- have breast cancer or a history of breast cancer
- have medical concerns
- are taking herbal supplements or medicines (prescriptions or over-the-counter)

What are the benefits of POP?

POP can be used by most people including those who can't use estrogen or:

- are over 35 years old and smoke
- have a history of migraines with aura or other nervous system problems affecting speech, vision, movement, or sensations
- have side effects from other types of birth control
- have recently had a baby or are breastfeeding

You can get pregnant as soon as you stop taking POP.

It is safe to take POP for many years. There is no need to “take a break” from it.

What are the side effects of POP?

The most common side effect is a change in your period. It might be early, late, or you might have spotting. Some people don't have periods at all while taking POP.

There is a chance (more likely in the first 3 months) that you might have:

- acne
- mild headaches
- tender breasts
- tiredness
- dizziness
- upset stomach (nausea)
- moodiness or depression
- cysts on the ovaries
- extra hair on your face or body
- decreased sex drive

If you have any side effects, don't stop taking POP. Talk to your health care provider. Most side effects get better after 3 months.

If you are concerned you could be pregnant and have been taking POP, talk to your health care provider. There is a higher risk of pregnancy outside of the uterus (ectopic pregnancy).

What if I forget to take a pill?

If you forget to take a pill, take it as soon as you remember (even if it means you take 2 pills in one day). Continue to take one pill at the same time each day. You **are not** protected from pregnancy. Use a backup form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) for 48 hours if you:

- take your pill more than 3 hours late
- forget to take 1 or more pills
- start a pill pack late
- are throwing up (vomiting) or have diarrhea and until it has stopped for 2 days

Think about getting **emergency contraception** as soon as possible to help prevent pregnancy, if your backup form of birth control fails or you had unprotected sex in the 5 days before your late pill.

Did You Know?

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- You can plan ahead and talk to your partner(s) about how to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- You can consider getting regular testing for STIs and HIV. Talk to your health care provider.
- Many clinics offer low or no cost birth control.

To find a clinic near you visit **[ahs.ca/srh](https://www.ahs.ca/srh)**

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.

Websites

- [ahs.ca/srh](https://www.ahs.ca/srh)
- [ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca](https://www.ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca)
- [teachingsexualhealth.ca](https://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)
- [myhealth.alberta.ca](https://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)
- [sexandu.ca](https://www.sexandu.ca)

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