

Progestin-Only Pill

What is the progestin-only pill (POP)?

- POP is a type of birth control pill you take every day to prevent pregnancy.
- POP contains one hormone (progestin). Other birth control pills contain two hormones (estrogen and progestin).
- POP comes as a 28-day pack (there are hormones in all 28 pills). There are no hormone-free pills.

POP prevents pregnancy by:

- decreasing the cervical mucous and making it thicker
- making the lining of the uterus thin
- slowing down the egg in the fallopian tube
- sometimes stopping an egg from being released

How well does POP work?

- 8 to 9 out of 10 women will get pregnant in one year if having intercourse without birth control.
- With typical use (this means not following the exact directions, for example, you might miss pills or take them late) POP is **90 to 95 percent** effective.
- With perfect use (this means you follow the exact directions all the time) POP is **99 percent** effective.
- You are more likely to get pregnant if you take your pill **over 3 hours late**.
- POP doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (vaginal, oral, anal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.

How do I start taking the POP?

To start POP, you will need to see your healthcare provider. You need a prescription for POP.

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 an extra form of birth control (e.g., condoms, abstinence) for 48 hours

Take one pill at the same time everyday.

Who can take POP?

You can take POP if you:

- are over 35 and smoke
- have migraine headaches
- need birth control without estrogen
- have side effects from other types of birth control
- are breastfeeding

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 women don't have periods at all while taking POP.

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

- acne
- mild headaches
- tender breasts
- tiredness
- dizziness
- slight weight gain or loss
- moodiness or depression
- decreased sex drive
- upset stomach (nausea)
- cysts on the ovaries

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

If you get pregnant while taking POP, there is a slightly higher chance that the pregnancy will be outside the uterus (ectopic pregnancy). If you are pregnant and have been taking POP, talk to your healthcare provider.

Did You Know

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- Plan ahead and decide to protect yourself to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- It is important to talk with your partner about how you can protect each other.
- 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 POP.
- Some medicines can affect POP. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before you take any medicine (prescriptions or over-the-counter).
- Don't take POP if you are pregnant or think you might be.

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).

Use another method 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

Think about getting **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if:

- your back-up method of birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks)
- you had unprotected sex in the **5 days before** you took your pill late

Websites

www.myhealth.alberta.ca

www.sexualityandu.ca

www.teachingsexualhealth.ca

www.albertahealthservices.ca and search for Sexual and Reproductive Health

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area, 780-408-5465 in the Edmonton area, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.

