

## Progestogen Only Pill (POP)

The progestogen only pill is often called the 'mini-pill' as it has no oestrogen in it unlike the standard 'pill' (COCP). The traditional progestogen-only pill (POP) prevents pregnancy by thickening the mucus in the cervix to stop sperm reaching an egg. The desogestrel progestogen-only pill can also stop ovulation. The progestogen-only pill needs to be taken every day to work. The POP is often advised if there is a contraindication to the COCP.

## Medical Assessment

You will be assessed for your suitability for a POP prior to a prescription. This will include:

- Blood pressure
- Assessment of medical history that may increase the risk of POP such as:
  - Breast cancer
  - Severe liver disease
  - Previous clot while on POP

## Effectiveness

The POP is over 99% effective with perfect use but it is estimated to be about 91% effective with typical use. Long acting reversible contraceptives (LARC) such as the implant or coil are the most effective contraception and should be considered especially if you may have difficulty sticking to the pill taking regime.

## Advantages and disadvantages

### Advantages

- it does not interrupt sex
- you can use it when breastfeeding
- it's useful if you cannot take the hormone oestrogen which is in the combined contraceptive pill (COCP)
- you can use it at any age

### Disadvantages

- you may not have regular periods while taking it – your periods may be lighter, more frequent, or may stop altogether, and you may get spotting between periods
- it does not protect you against STIs
- you need to remember to take it at or around the same time every day

There is no evidence that POP causes significant weight gain and it does not have any long term effect on fertility.

## Taking the Pill

### Starting the Pill

You can start the progestogen-only pill at any time in your menstrual cycle.

If you start it on day 1 to 5 of your menstrual cycle (the first 5 days of your period), it'll work straight away and you'll be protected against pregnancy. You will not need additional contraception.

If you have a short menstrual cycle, you'll need additional contraception, such as condoms, until you've taken the pill for 2 days.

If you start the progestogen-only pill on any other day of your cycle, you will not be protected from pregnancy straight away and will need additional contraception until you've taken the pill for 2 days.

How to take the POP

The POP is more time sensitive than the COCP. There are 2 different types of progestogen-only pill:

- **3-hour progestogen-only pill** (traditional progestogen-only pill) – must be taken within 3 hours of the same time each day
- **12-hour progestogen-only pill** (desogestrel progestogen-only pill) – must be taken within 12 hours of the same time each day

Choose a convenient time in the day to take your first pill. Continue to take a pill at the same time each day until the pack is finished. Start your next pack of pills the following day – there's no break between packs of pills

Missed Pills

If you're taking a 3-hour progestogen-only pill and are more than 3 hours late taking it, or you're taking the 12-hour progestogen-only pill and are more than 12 hours late, **you will not be protected against pregnancy.**

- take a pill as soon as you remember – only take 1, even if you've missed more than 1 pill
- take the next pill at the usual time – this may mean taking 2 pills on the same day (1 when you remember and 1 at the usual time); this is not harmful
- carry on taking your remaining pills each day at the usual time
- use extra contraception such as condoms for the next 2 days (48 hours) after you remember to take your missed pill, or do not have sex
- if you have unprotected sex from the time that you miss your pill until 2 days after you start taking it reliably again, you may need emergency contraception

## Medical Review

You will be reviewed for a renewal of your prescription at least every 6 months. You should seek attention if you develop any problematic bleeding, you have a significant new medical condition or you start any new medication.

## More information

This guide is not exhaustive, more information can be found in the patient information leaflet that accompanies your pill or at this website <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/contraception>