

## **Progestogen only pills (POP)**

This pill contains a progestogen hormone but is different to a combined pill because it does not contain any oestrogen.

### **HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE POP**

If it is taken according to instructions, it can be 99% effective. It may be less effective in women who weigh more than 70 kgs (11 stone).

### **HOW DOES IT WORK**

This low dose pill work mainly by:

- thickening the mucus at the neck of the womb and blocking sperm from meeting an egg
- sometimes it stops your ovaries producing an egg
- sometimes it makes the lining of the womb thinner so that it is less likely to accept a fertilised egg

### **WHO IS IT SUITABLE FOR**

- if you wish to take a very low dose hormone pill
- if there are medical reasons that you should not take oestrogen eg. if you are over 35 years old and a smoker or if you are at risk from heart disease or stroke
- if you are breast feeding

### **HOW TO TAKE YOUR PILLS**

Start your pill on the first day of your period. Take one tablet every day without a break between packets. Do not stop when you have a period. It is very important to take the pills at much the same time of day, every day.

### **WHEN AM I SAFE**

You will be safe from the first pill if you start the first packet on the first day of your period. You will be safe from then on if you take them regularly. Think out a routine to help you remember eg. after breakfast or after your main meal in the evening.

### **WHEN AM I NOT SAFE**

You are advised to use additional contraception for seven days:

- if you are more than three hours late in taking your pill
- if vomiting or very bad diarrhoea occurs
- if you start taking your pill on any day other than the first day of your period
- if you are taking a prescribed medicine which affects how the pill works. Check with the doctor who is prescribing the medicine or a chemist. Common antibiotics are not known to affect the progestogen only pill.

### **CHANGING FROM THE COMBINED PILL**

If you are changing from the combined pill, you should start the progestogen only pill the day after you take your last combined pill. Do not have a break between packets. You will then have immediate protection against becoming pregnant.

## STARTING THE PILL AFTER A BABY

You can start any time after the baby is three weeks old (there is an increased risk of irregular bleeding if you start earlier). Breast feeding is not affected.

## WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS

- you may not have regular periods whilst you are taking the progestogen only pill. Your periods may stop altogether or be irregular, light or more frequent. This does you no harm but you may find it a nuisance
- you may get temporary side effects such as acne and tender breasts. Very often they will settle after a few months
- some women may develop small fluid cysts on their ovaries. These are harmless and do not usually need to be removed, but they may give some pain or discomfort. Usually there are no symptoms. The cysts usually disappear without treatment
- if you do become pregnant while you are taking the progestogen only pill, there is a small risk of pregnancy developing outside your womb (ectopic pregnancy). Although ectopic pregnancies are rare, they are dangerous and you should see your doctor straight away if you have sudden pain in your lower abdomen and your period is light or is late

## IF I DON'T HAVE A PERIOD

If you miss a period don't worry. It is quite common with the progestogen only pill. If you have taken all of your pills correctly and you did not have an upset stomach or take any other tablets which might affect the progestogen only pill, then it is unlikely that you are pregnant, so take your pills as normal. If you are worried ask your family planning clinic or doctor for advice and you may need a pregnancy test.

## REASONS WHY THE PILL DOES NOT ALWAYS WORK

The commonest reason for the pill not working is forgetting to take it regularly. Other reasons are listed.

Vomiting the pill back. If this happens more than four hours after swallowing it, it has already got into your system and doesn't matter. If you vomit within four hours of taking it, start again as soon as you can but follow the advice given when you forget a pill.

Diarrhoea - This only matters if it is very bad (running straight through you) and the advice is the same as for forgetting pills.

- Medicines. Some medicines may *make the pill work less well*- If you are taking any other medication, check the list below. Bleeding or spotting when you do not expect it can be a sign that the pill may not be working properly due to the effects of one of these medicines.
- **Drugs for Epilepsy** - Phenobarbitone, Mysoline (Primidone), Topamax, Epanutin (Phenytoin), Tegretol (Carbamazepine), Zarontin (Ethosuximide). You should have a stronger rather than a weaker pill. Epilim (Sodium Valproate) does not affect the pill.
- **Drugs for fungal infections** - Grisoven (Griseofulvin), Diflucan
- (Flucunazole)Drugs for *stomach ulcers* - Zoton (Lanzoprazole)

- The pill may interfere with the effect of some medicines **and increase their side effects.**
- Sleeping Pills and Tranquillisers - Diazepam, Librium (Chlordiazepoxide) - May possibly interfere in a few cases.

IT IS GENERALLY ADVISED TO TAKE OTHER PRECAUTIONS EG. CONDOMS WHILE YOU ARE ON THE ABOVE TABLETS OR DISCUSS WITH THE DOCTOR ABOUT TAKING A HIGHER DOSE PILL.

Consult a doctor, health visitor or family planning nurse if you are worried.