

# Progestogen Only Pill



## Quick Facts

**Method**  
*Hormonal*

**Effectiveness**  
*91-99.7%*

**Return to Fertility**  
*No delay*

**Availability**  
*Prescription required*



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## What is it?

The progestogen only pill (POP) contains only one hormone, progestogen. The POP needs to be taken on a continuous daily basis with no breaks to effectively protect against pregnancy.

## How does it work?

### The progestogen only pill prevents pregnancy by:

- thickening mucus in the cervix to prevent sperm from entering into the uterus (womb). This is its main action
- changing the lining of the uterus, making it difficult for a fertilised egg to implant
- sometimes stopping the body from releasing an ovum (egg) every month (ovulation), but this varies between women and between cycles.

## How effective is it?

The progestogen only pill is 91-99.7% effective at preventing pregnancy. Effectiveness depends on how regularly you take your pill and your age. Women over 40 and those who are breastfeeding have the lowest rate of pregnancy.

## Who can take it?

The progestogen only pill is suitable for most women, but there may be health risks for some.

### The POP may be unsuitable for women who:

- may forget to take the pill at the same time every day
- have ever had breast cancer
- take certain prescribed medication such as anti-epileptic drugs.

## How do I take it?

The progestogen only pill comes in monthly packages, with 28 active hormone pills and no inactive sugar pills.

You can start taking the POP at any time during your menstrual cycle. The POP is effective immediately if taken during the first five days of your period. If started at any other time, the POP becomes effective once you've taken three consecutive daily pills.

The progestogen only pill **MUST** be taken at the same time every day without a break, even if you're having a period.

## What if I miss a pill?

If you are more than three hours late taking the progestogen only pill, the risk of pregnancy increases – this is when progestogen levels in your body are at their lowest and the mucus in your cervix begins to thin. Take the late pill as soon as you remember and then resume taking your pills at your regular time. You can't rely on the POP until you've taken three consecutive daily pills.

**If you've had sex without a condom and realise that you're late taking your pill, consider emergency contraception.**

Different methods of emergency contraception are available, such as emergency contraceptive pills and copper IUD. Emergency contraception is most effective when used as soon as possible after unprotected sex. Visit your doctor, pharmacist or ring the Sexual Health Helpline as soon as possible.

*“Anna takes her progestogen only pill at 7am every day. She sleeps in on Sunday morning and takes her pill at 11am as soon as she wakes up. As she is more than three hours late taking the pill, she needs to take a daily pill for three consecutive days before she can rely on the POP to protect against pregnancy. She resumes taking her next pill at 7am on Monday morning.”*

## Can I get pregnant?

**Your chance of getting pregnant on the progestogen only pill is greater if:**

- you are more than three hours late taking the pill
- you take other prescribed medications such as some anti-epileptic drugs and some medications used to treat tuberculosis or HIV
- you take herbal medicines such as St John's Wort
- you vomit within two hours of taking the pill or you have severe diarrhoea, the POP may not be absorbed properly, making it less effective.

## Advantages

- A very effective form of contraception.
- Can be used by women who cannot take or tolerate oestrogen.
- Does not increase the risk of deep vein thrombosis.
- Allows fertility to return quickly after stopping.
- Safe to use while breastfeeding.
- No effect on migraine headaches.
- Safe for women who smoke.

## Disadvantages

- Needs to be taken at the same time every day to be effective.
- May alter menstrual patterns.

**The progestogen only pill does not protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).**

SHQ is on Whadjuk land. We acknowledge the traditional owners of country across Western Australia.



**SHQ (Sexual Health Quarters)**  
70 Roe St, Northbridge WA 6003  
Ph 08 9227 6177  
info@shq.org.au

**Sexual Health Helpline**  
Metro 08 9227 6178  
Country 1800 198 205  
sexhelp@shq.org.au