

## Progestogen-Only Contraceptive Pill (POP) CONTRACEPTION



Family Planning Tasmania  
sexuality education & clinical services

### What is the progestogen-only pill?

The progestogen-only pill is an oral contraceptive containing a low dose of the hormone progestogen. It is taken every day to prevent pregnancy. The **POP** (sometimes referred to as the 'mini-pill') contains progestogen only. Progestogen is similar to the hormone progesterone which is naturally produced by the female body.

### How does the POP work?

#### The POP works by:

- thickening the mucus of the cervix so that sperm cannot enter the uterus (womb)
- changing the lining of the uterus, making it unsuitable for pregnancy
- affecting ovulation (egg release from the ovary) in some women

### What are the advantages of the Progestogen-only Pill (POP)?

- it contains a very low dose of hormones
- it is reversible with a rapid return to usual fertility
- side effects are rare
- it can be taken by women who are unable to take the combined contraceptive pill because of side effects or health issues with oestrogen
- it may safely be used by breastfeeding women
- it is suitable for women who are over 35 and smoke

### What are the disadvantages of the Progestogen-only Pill (POP)?

- it must be taken at the same time every day to be effective
- it may be less effective than other hormonal methods in younger women
- there may be unpredictable bleeding (see side effects)
- it does not protect against sexually transmitted infections

### What do I need to know about starting the POP?

Starting the POP for the first time requires an assessment by a doctor and a prescription. The doctor will assess your medical history and explain how to use the POP. It is important to follow these instructions to know when you will be protected from pregnancy. The assessment visit also enables you to ask any questions that you may have about the POP and be certain that it is the most suitable method for you.

### What do I need to know about the ongoing use of the POP?

All pills in a POP packet are **active** pills. There is **no 'pill free' break** or non-hormonal pills. The pill should be taken at the **same time** every day or within **3** hours of that time. To renew your POP prescription you will need to see a doctor for review at least once a year.

### How effective is the POP?

The progestogen-only pill is 95-99.5% effective. This means that on average, if 100 women take the POP, between 1 and 4 women may become pregnant in a year. It is most effective when taken according to instructions.

### The POP may not be effective if:

- a pill is missed
- a pill is taken more than 3 hours late
- vomiting occurs within 2-3 hours of taking a pill
- certain medications are taken as these may interfere with the effectiveness of the POP. Some non-prescribed medications, such as St Johns wort (or hypericum) can make the POP less effective. Always check with the pharmacist. If you are concerned about any of the above situations, check with your doctor or health professional.

## What are the possible side effects or complications of taking the POP?

Side effects are uncommon but may include:

- changes in bleeding patterns including: periods stopping completely
- irregular periods or spot bleeding
- ovarian cysts – usually there are no symptoms and do not require treatment
- headaches
- breast tenderness
- ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy in the Fallopian tubes). This is a rare complication and is less likely to occur in POP users than if no contraception was used. Methods that stop ovulation completely are preferred for women who have a past history of ectopic pregnancy.

## Is the POP suitable for all women?

Most women can safely use the POP. However there are some factors which may mean that POP is not an acceptable form of contraception for you. See your health professional at a Family Planning Clinic or General Practice for more information.

## What should I do if I miss a pill?

With the POP it is very important that pills are taken at **THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY** for it to be most effective. **If you are MORE than 3** hours past your regular pill taking time, take it as soon as you remember and then resume taking your pills as usual, but use other contraception (eg condoms) or avoid intercourse for the next 48 hours.

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## Do I need Emergency Contraception?

Emergency contraception should be considered if sexual activity has occurred around the days before or after pills have been missed or taken late, or after illness, Emergency contraception can be used to help prevent pregnancy. It can be obtained from pharmacies without prescription, Family Planning Tasmania (FPT) clinics or general practitioners (GPs),

## What should I do if I am sick?

If you vomit within 2 hours of taking the pill it may not be effective. Take another pill as soon as you can. Severe diarrhoea can sometimes interfere with the effectiveness of the POP. Follow the 'missed pill' advice as outlined above.

If you are sick or have missed a pill and you are not sure what to do, contact your doctor, local FPT clinic or read the instructions/information sheet provided in the pill packet.

## Where is the POP available?

The POP is available on prescription from your local FPT clinic or GP.

### Disclaimer:

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