

Combined Hormonal Oral Contraceptive - Commonly known as 'The Pill'

What is the Pill?

The Pill, also known as the combined pill or oral contraceptive, contains oestrogen & progesterone, which are hormones similar to the ones made in a woman's ovaries.

Many brands of the Pill are available in Australia. All have different types and doses of progesterone and oestrogen in them.

Most packets of the Pill contain either:

- 28 pills – 21 hormone pills and 7 non-hormone pills (pills which do not contain either hormone).
- 24 hormone pills and 4 non-hormone pills.



How does the Pill work?

- The 2 hormones work together to prevent pregnancy by stopping the release of an egg each month (ovulation).
- They also cause a thickening of the mucus in the cervix which stops sperm from entering the uterus (womb).
- When you take the non-hormonal pills within your 28 day packet of pills you will get a "withdrawal bleed" which is like a period.

How well does it work?

- The Pill is a tablet that needs to be taken at the same time each day.
- If used correctly it is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.
- It can be less effective if it is missed or not taken at the correct time.
- It can be less effective if you have diarrhea or vomit within 2 hours of taking the pill.
- Certain medications, including epileptic & herbal remedies, can reduce the effectiveness of the Pill.

Who can take the Pill?

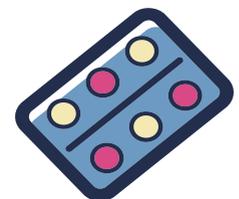
Women can safely use the Pill up to the age of 50 years of age as long as there are NO medical reasons not to.

Medical reasons where taking the Pill is not recommended include:

- A history of deep vein thrombosis (DVT - blood clot in the vein), a stroke, heart attack or other types of heart disease.
- A condition prone to blood clots.
- Breast or liver cancer.
- Severe liver problems.
- Certain types of migraines.
- Systemic Lupus erythematosus (SLE).
- Unusual vaginal bleeding.
- Over 35 years old and smoke.

You also may not be able to take the Pill if you:

- Have high blood pressure or diabetes.
- Are overweight.



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Is the Pill right for me?

The Pill may **not be** the right choice if:

- You have difficulty remembering to take the pill at the same time every day.
- You have spotting or breakthrough bleeding.
- You cannot have the hormone oestrogen.



*There is a small risk of blood clots (deep vein thrombosis), stroke and heart attack.
This risk increases if you smoke, have high blood pressure or diabetes.*

Advantages

- Works well when taken correctly i.e. taken at the same time every day.
- Can reduce period pain and heavy menstrual bleeding.
- Can be used to prevent a period.
- Fertility returns to normal straight away when you stop taking them.
- Reduces the symptoms of endometriosis.
- Regulates monthly bleeding, which is good for women who have irregular bleeding (periods).
- May improve premenstrual syndrome (PMS).
- Can improve acne.
- Can reduce the risk of some cancers including ovarian, uterine and bowel cancers.

Possible side effects

- Headaches.
- Nausea or bloating.
- Breast tenderness.
- Acne.
- Mood changes.
- Reduced interest in sex.
- Skin changes - brown marks.



Most side effects settle within 3 months. If they continue & are impacting on your lifestyle, consult a doctor.

Where can I get the Pill?

Starting the Pill for the first time requires an assessment by a doctor & you will need a prescription.

The Pill is available from most pharmacies with a prescription. The cost of the Pill is largely dependent on whether you have a Concession and/or Medicare card.

Your doctor will be able to identify which brand of the Pill is most suitable for you.

For more information, support & advice visit www.fpt.asn.au

FPT acknowledges the contribution of FPV and FPNSW in the development of this fact sheet

Every effort has been made to ensure the information on this page is up to date and accurate. You need to consider the appropriateness of the information as it does not take into account your own specific health needs. We advise that you discuss this information with your healthcare provider.

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How do I take the Pill?

The Pill needs to be taken (swallowed) at the same time every day.



It is recommended to start the Pill in the first 5 days of a normal period. In this case the Pill will be effective immediately.

You can start later in your monthly cycle but you will need to wait 7 days for the Pill to become effective.

When you are on the Pill you will have a period whilst you are taking the non-hormonal pills (sugar pills). This is referred to as withdrawal bleeding.

You can choose to skip your period (withdrawal bleeding) by not taking the non-hormonal tablets (sugar pills) and continue with the first hormonal pill of a new packet the following day.

Set a reminder on your phone, calendar etc to help you remember to take your Pill.

What could stop the Pill from working?

The Pill might not work if:

- You are more than 24 hours late taking it or missed more than 1 pill.
- You vomit within 2 hours of taking the Pill.
- You have had severe diarrhoea.
- You are taking certain medications and natural remedies. Check with your doctor.

What else do I need to know?

- If you run out of pills & can't get into a doctor to get a prescription, speak to the pharmacist. Some pharmacists may give you a packet of pills if you show them your old pill packet.
- If you are breast feeding you can not use the Pill until your baby is 6 weeks old.
- You need to stop the Pill immediately if you think you are pregnant.
- If you get pregnant whilst on the Pill there is no evidence to suggest it will affect the pregnancy.
- Some studies show an increased risk of breast cancer in women taking the Pill.
- The Pill does not protect you from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs).



Need to know?

- Below is a guide for the Combined Contraceptive Pill. If you are taking the progestogen-only pill you need to refer to the instructions in your packet.
- The Pill Qlaira also has different instructions for missed/late pills.
- It is a good idea to check your pill packet for instructions for missed/late pills.
- Contact your doctor or nearest Family Planning Clinic if you are unsure about a missed or late pill.

Are you less than 24 hours late in taking your Pill?

- Step 1**
- Take the Pill as soon as you can.
- Step 2**
- Take your next pill at the usual time. This may mean you take 2 pills in one day.

Please Note:

The Pill is still effective in protecting you against pregnancy

Are you more than 24 hours late in taking your Pill?

- Step 1**
- Take the Pill as soon as you can.
- Step 2**
- Take your next pill at the usual time. It may mean you take 2 pills in one day.
- Step 3**
- Throw away any other missed pills.
- Step 4**
- Keep on taking the Pill as usual.
- Step 5**
- You may need Emergency Contraception. See below.
- Step 6**
- Have you missed 1 or more pills & have less than 7 hormone pills left?
- If YES**
- Continue taking the remaining hormone pills.
 - Skip the non-hormonal pills (commonly known as the sugar pills) and continue onto 'Day 1' of the next packet.

Please Note:

*At this time, the Pill **will not** be effective in protecting you against pregnancy.*

*** You need to use other types of contraception e.g. condoms or not have sex for the next 7 days.*



When do I need Emergency Contraception (EC)?

You need to consider getting Emergency Contraception if:

- **You have had unprotected sex anytime within a week (7 days) of being 24 hours late in taking your last pill or missed more than 1 pill (**see above ****).**
- You have missed more than one pill in the first week of starting a new pill packet and have had unprotected sex within the last 5 days.
- You are more than 24 hours late in starting a new pill packet and have had unprotected sex within the last 5 days.

