

Whole Woman's Health of Baltimore

7648 Bel Air Road * Baltimore MD 21236

(410) 661-2900 * (800)997-7942

PROGESTIN-ONLY ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES—“The Mini-Pill” (BIRTH CONTROL PILLS)

What is it?

Oral contraceptives, or the “birth control pill,” are a hormonal medication taken daily by mouth to prevent pregnancy. Unlike the more common combination pills, progestin-only pills contain only progestin and no estrogen.

How does it work?

Progestin-only pills usually work by thickening the cervical mucus. For many women, they also work by preventing ovulation.

How do I use it? How do I get it?

A doctor or clinician will do an exam, review your medical history, and prescribe the pill. The pill must be taken every day at the same time. Some medications, such as antibiotics and seizure medications, may interfere with the pill's effectiveness.

What are the advantages?

The pill is very effective when taken correctly. It does not interrupt sex in any way, allowing for more spontaneity. Progestin-only contraceptives are safe for women who are breast-feeding.

Taking progestin-only hormonal contraceptives can provide some additional benefits other than contraceptive ones. These include scanty or no periods, less anemia, suppression of pain related to ovulation, and decreased risk of endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, and pelvic inflammatory disease.

What are the disadvantages? What are the possible side effects?

Most side effects of the pill are not serious. The most common side effects women report are weight gain, breast tenderness, and depression. Most women on progestin-only contraceptives report irregularity in their menstruation or ovulation, including reduced or no periods after using the contraceptive for a few months.

The serious side effects of the pill occur very infrequently, especially if you are in good health and do not smoke. However, you should know that certain medical conditions have been associated with or made worse by the pill, including blood clots, heart disease, or high blood pressure. Notify Whole Woman's Health if you notice any unusual physical disturbances while taking the pill.

How effective is it?

The mini-pill is 98% effective when taken perfectly. It is about 92% effective with typical (imperfect) use.

Who cannot use this method?

For the majority of women, oral contraceptives can be taken safely. But there are some women who are at high risk of developing certain serious diseases that can be life-threatening or may cause temporary or permanent disability or death. The risks associated with taking progestin-only oral contraceptives increase significantly if you have liver conditions, cardiovascular conditions, or diabetes. You should not take the pill if you suspect you are pregnant, have unexplained vaginal bleeding, or have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

***Remember, only a latex condom or polyurethane condom can protect you from HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.

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WHAT TO DO IF YOU MISS PILLS:

If you take one “active” pill three hours late or less:

1. Take it as soon as you remember. Take the next pill at your regular time. This means you may take two pills in one day.
2. You do not need to use a back up method if you are less than 3 hours late .

If you miss two “active” pills in a row:

1. Take two pills on the day you remember and two pills the next day.
2. Then take one pill a day until you finish the pack.
3. You **MAY BECOME PREGNANT** if you have intercourse in the 7 days after you miss pills. To be safe you must use a back up method such as condoms for those 7 days.

IF YOU ARE STILL NOT SURE WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE PILLS YOU HAVE MISSED:

1. Use a back-up method such as condoms and foam any time you have intercourse.
2. Keep taking one active pill each day
3. Call Whole Woman's Health with any questions

If you are struggling with taking the pill correctly and on schedule, we have many other contraception options for you. We are here to help you find the method that is best for you—don't be afraid to call us.

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