

MINI-PILL: Progestin-only Oral Contraceptive

WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS

Mini-pills have only one hormone: progestin. Mini-pills have no estrogen. Most of us are more familiar with combined oral contraceptives, commonly referred to as “the birth control pill.” These combined pills contain both progestin and estrogen. Mini-pills have no estrogen and a lower amount of progestin than combined birth control pills. It is important to understand this because many of the rules you learned about combined birth control pills do not apply to mini-pills. The progestin in the mini-pill is the same type used in combined-pills, only in smaller amounts. The mini-pill may do all or any combination of the following to prevent pregnancy: change the cervical mucus to hinder the movement of sperm into the uterus; prevent the implantation of the egg in the uterus by changing the lining of the uterus; or prevent ovulation (the release of the egg from the ovary).

INSTRUCTION FOR USE

Each pack has 28 pills containing the same amount of progestin. Each pill is a real pill. Take one pill every day. To start your pills: 1) if you are changing from a combined-pill to a mini-pill, begin the mini-pill the day after you take your last real hormone pill; 2) if you are not changing from a combined-pill, then begin the mini-pill on the first day of your period.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU TAKE A PILL LATE

Because the dose of the progestin is low, it is very important to take one pill each day at the same time. Try hard not to miss any pills! If you do miss a pill, take it as soon as you remember and take your next pill at the regular time. Use a second method of birth control for the next seven days (if you miss a pill during this time, continue to use a backup method of birth control until you have taken your pills correctly seven days in a row). If you miss more than one pill in a row, call Family Planning for instructions. **Remember, the contraceptive effectiveness of the mini-pill decreases if you miss a pill or take a pill late.**

EFFECTIVENESS

The theoretical effectiveness of the mini-pill is slightly less than that of the combined pills, around 96-97% effective. However, effectiveness rates tell us nothing about how effective this method will be for you. Here’s what we do know: 1) no method is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy; 2) using a method consistently and correctly reduces the chance of method failure; and 3) all methods of birth control, when used correctly and consistently, dramatically reduce your chances of getting pregnant. **YOU ARE IN CONTROL. USE YOUR METHOD CORRECTLY AND CONSISTENTLY. Pregnancy rates are highest in the first six months of use. To improve effectiveness, you may want to use an additional birth control method during the first two months.**

THE MINI-PILL IS LESS EFFECTIVE AT THESE TIMES

Use a second method of birth control for extra protection if you:

1. Take antacids
2. Take antibiotics
3. Have severe diarrhea
4. Vomit within two hours of taking a pill
5. Take any pills late or miss a pill

BLEEDING PATTERNS ON THE MINI-PILL

While on the mini-pill, your menstrual cycle may be regular or irregular. Unlike the combined-pill that regulates menstrual cycles, mini-pills may disrupt normal bleeding patterns. There is no way to predict what your pattern will be. Your cycle, (the time between menstrual periods) may vary. Continue taking a pill every day.

BENEFITS

No Estrogen. In some women, progestin-only pills may eliminate some side effects caused by the estrogen in combined pills such as increased blood pressure, nausea, headaches, and breast soreness. The mini-pill also decreases the chances of major complications associated with estrogens.

Non contraceptive benefits include:

- Light periods or no periods
- Decreased anemia
- Decreased menstrual cramps and pain
- Suppression of pain associated with ovulation
- Decreased risk of developing endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

WHO SHOULD USE THE MINI-PILL

Progestin-only pills offer the advantage of having no estrogen; therefore, certain women are good candidates for using the mini-pill. Here are some groups that may benefit:

- Breastfeeding women
- Smokers over the age of 35
- Women with migraine headaches
- Women who have hypertension
- Women who cannot take estrogen

POSSIBLE MINOR SIDE EFFECTS

- Irregular menstrual periods
- Weight gain
- Moodiness or depression
- Sex drive change

Usually these changes occur in the first few months of the mini-pill and improve with time. Many women never experience any of these side effects.

POSSIBLE MAJOR SIDE EFFECTS

Progestin-only pill, because they contain no estrogen, carry less of a risk for serious complications, however, you should be aware of the following serious side effects:

- Blood clots in the lungs or legs
- Stroke
- Heart attack
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Call Family Planning or your doctor right away if you have any of the warning signs listed below:

- **A Abdominal pain (severe)**
- **C Chest pain or shortness of breath**
- **H Headaches (severe)**
- **E Eye problems (blurring, loss of vision, flashing lights)**
- **S Severe leg pain or swelling (calf or thigh)**

You have a higher chance of having a serious problem if you:

- Have high blood pressure
- Are 35 or older
- Have diabetes
- Have high cholesterol
- Have migraine headaches
- Smoke cigarettes

When you seek medical care for any reason, always let your doctor know that you are taking the mini-pill.

PREGNANCY AND THE MINI-PILL

As a general rule, if you take your pill every day, at the same time each day, you are protected from pregnancy. However, if you go longer than 45 days without any bleeding, you should have a pregnancy test done. Please call the Family Planning Office to make an appointment for a pregnancy test and pelvic exam.

STOPPING MINI-PILL USE

Once the contraceptive effect is no longer desired, you may simply stop taking your pill. You will probably have withdrawal bleeding. If you are planning to become pregnant, we recommend a barrier method until you have a regular period. Most women return to a normal menstrual cycle in a few months.