

## Progestin-Only Pills (POPs)

### What are progestin-only birth control pills?

Progestin-only birth control pills (sometimes called the “mini pill” or POPS) are oral pills taken daily that contain one hormone called progestin.



### How do progestin-only pills work?

They work by thickening the cervical fluid to keep sperm from reaching an egg, but also may stop the release of an egg (ovulation) in some users.

### How effective are progestin-only pills?

- Progestin-only pills are 93% effective when used correctly.
- Some medications including herbal supplements can interfere with hormonal birth control. Talk to your healthcare provider.

Progestin-only pills must be taken at the same time every day. You can set an alarm or use a reminder app.

### Advantages

- Lighter periods or no periods at all
- Can be used by people who cannot take estrogen
- Safe to use when breastfeeding
- Fertility returns quickly once you stop taking POPs

### Disadvantages

- Must take a pill at the same time every day
- Irregular bleeding is common, including spotting and sometimes prolonged bleeding
- Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections
- Some users may experience mild side effects

### Side effects

Some people have side effects which usually go away a few weeks after starting the medication:

- Nausea
- Sore breasts
- Weight gain or loss
- Irregular bleeding, spotting, sometimes prolonged bleeding
- Headaches
- Mood changes
- Skin changes

If you experience side effects and they bother you, go to a clinic or pharmacy to talk about other options **before** you stop using POPs.

### WARNING

#### Reasons to get urgent medical help:

- Frequent or very bad headaches
- Severe pain in your stomach
- Severe leg pain
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Sudden change in seeing or speaking clearly

Birth control is free for BC residents with MSP. For more information, check out the BC Pharmacare website.

### Where can you get progestin-only pills?

- POPs are available only by prescription and are free if you have MSP.
- Sexual health clinics, pharmacies or your health care provider can provide a prescription for you.
- Some clinics may offer POPs for low or no cost if you don't have MSP.

### The progestin-only pill DOES NOT protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

STI testing is recommended every 6-12 months and/or when you have a new partner(s).  
STI testing is available at a sexual health clinic or with your health care provider.

## How do you take progestin-only pills?

- Start taking the progestin-only pill right away (or on the first day of your next period).
- Take one pill every day at the same time.
- Use a back up method (e.g. condoms) for 2 days after starting POPs.
- With POPs it is essential to take them at the same time every day. You can set an alarm or use a reminder app.
- When you take the last pill in the package, start a new package the next day. Do not take any breaks or days off between packs.
- If you take the POP more than 3 hours late, there may be a risk of pregnancy.

POPs are effective in preventing pregnancy after 2 days of use. **Use condoms as back-up for the first two days.**

## What if you miss taking a progestin-only pill or take it late?

Pregnancy may occur if birth control is not used properly when sexually active.

### If you took your pill more than 3 hours late or missed a pill:

- Take one pill as soon as you remember, continue taking one pill daily at the same time each day.
- Use back up method (e.g. condoms), or do not have sex for 48 hours.
- Consider using emergency contraception if you had sex without a condom in the last 5-7 days.
- The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) can be taken within the last 5 days.
- An IUD can also be used as an option for Emergency Contraception up to 7 days after unprotected sex with effectiveness of 99%.
- Call a sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE for more information.

### Excessive vomiting or diarrhea within 4 hours after taking a POP:

- Your body might not properly absorb the medicine in POPs with severe vomiting or diarrhea.
- Keep taking the pills on schedule but use a back up method (e.g. condoms) every time you have sex, until 48 hours of vomiting or diarrhea are over.

Check out “*Stay on Schedule: Your guide to taking contraception after a missed or late dose*” at [www.sexandu.ca/sos/](http://www.sexandu.ca/sos/)

## Questions?

If you have questions about your birth control, do not stop taking it. Call your health care provider, sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE.

## Find the clinic closest to you:

<https://www.vch.ca/en/service/sexual-health-clinics>

[www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org)



This fact sheet contains general information and should not be used in place of individual consultation with a qualified healthcare provider.