Your guide to the Progestogen Only Pill

SUMMARY

This pill contains a progestogen hormone which is similar to the natural progesterone women produce in their ovaries.

Progestogen-only pills (POPs) contain different types of progestogens. POPs containing desogestrel will be named specifically where relevant in this booklet. If you are not sure what type of progestogen is in your POP check the patient information leaflet inside your pack or ask your doctor or nurse.

POPs are different to combined pills because they do not contain any estrogen.

How effective is the POP?

How effective any contraceptive is depends on how old you are, how often you have sex and whether you follow the instructions.

If 100 sexually active women don’t use any contraception, 80 to 90 will become pregnant in a year.

If taken according to instructions the POP is over 99 per cent effective. This means that less than one woman in 100 will get pregnant in a year.

If the POP is not taken according to instructions, more women will become pregnant.

How does the POP work?
The POP works in a number of ways.

• The main action of desogestrel POPs is to stop your ovaries releasing an egg (ovulation). Other types of POP sometimes stop you releasing an egg.
• All POPs thicken the mucus from your cervix. This makes it difficult for sperm to move through it and reach an egg.
• All POPs make the lining of your uterus (womb) thinner so it is less likely to accept a fertilised egg.

Where can I get the POP?

You can go to a contraception or sexual health clinic, or general practice. If you prefer not to go to your own general practice, or if they don’t provide contraceptive services, they can give you information about another practice or clinic. All treatment is free and confidential. You don’t need to have a vaginal or breast examination or cervical screening test when you are first prescribed the POP.

Can anyone use the POP?

Most women can use the POP but a doctor or nurse will ask you about your own and your family’s medical history. Do mention any illness or operations you have had. Some of the conditions which may mean you should not use the POP are:

• you think you might be pregnant
• you take certain medicines.

You have now or had in the past:

• heart disease or a stroke
• disease of the liver
• systemic lupus erythematosus

• current breast cancer or breast cancer within the last five years.

If you are healthy and there are no medical reasons for you not to take it, you can take it until menopause or until you are 55 years.

What are the advantages of the POP?

Some of the advantages of the POP are:

• you can use it if breastfeeding
• useful if you can’t take estrogens, like those in combined pill, contraceptive patch or vaginal ring
• especially useful if you smoke and are 35 or over
• it may help with premenstrual symptoms and painful periods.

Other headings

What are the disadvantages of the POP?

Are there any risks?

How do I start the POP?

I’ve just had a baby. Can I use the POP?

Can I use the POP after a miscarriage or abortion?

How do I take the POP?

What if I forget to take it on time?