your guide to
the progestogen-
only pill

Helping you choose the method of contraception that is best for you
The progestogen-only pill (POP)

This pill contains a progestogen hormone which is similar to the natural progesterone women produce in their ovaries. Progestogen-only pills are different to combined pills because they do not contain any oestrogen. There are different types of POP available, some containing different progestogens.

Questions & Answers

How effective is the POP? 3
How does the POP work? 3
Where can I get the POP? 4
Can anyone use the POP? 4
What are the advantages of the POP? 5
What are the disadvantages of the POP? 5
Are there any risks? 6
How do I start the POP? 6
How do I take the POP? 7
What if I forget to take it on time? 7
What if I want to change to a different pill? 7
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 99% effective. This means that 1 woman in 100 will get pregnant in a year.

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

There is a possibility with some POPs that they are less effective in women who weigh over 70kg (11 stones).

How does the POP work?

The pill works in a number of ways.
• It works mainly by thickening the mucus from your cervix. This makes it difficult for sperm to

Can anything make the POP less effective? 8
What do I do if I forget a pill? 8
What should I do if I think I’m pregnant? 9
How often do I need to see a doctor or nurse? 9
At what age should I stop taking the POP? 9
I’ve just had a baby. Can I take the POP? 10
Can I start the POP after a miscarriage/abortion? 10
I want to have a baby. Can I try to get pregnant as soon as I stop taking the POP? 10
How do I find out about contraception services? 10
Emergency contraception 11
Sexually transmitted infections 11
How fpa can help you 12
A final word 12
move through it and reach an egg.

- It makes the lining of your womb thinner so it is less likely to accept a fertilised egg.
- It sometimes stops your ovaries releasing an egg (ovulation). This is the main action of one POP: Cerazette. This may mean that Cerazette is more effective than other POPs, but research has not yet confirmed this.

Where can I get the POP?
Family planning doctors, nurses and most GPs provide contraception. You can go to another general practice if you prefer not to see your own doctor. (See page 10)

Can anyone use the POP?
Not all women can take the POP and 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 cannot use the POP are:
- you think you might already be pregnant
- you could not cope with any changes to your periods

You have now or had in the past:
- a heart attack or stroke (severe arterial disease)
- an active disease of the liver or gall bladder
- breast cancer
- unexplained bleeding from your vagina (for example, between periods or after sex)
- a history of ovarian cysts
- an ectopic pregnancy
What are the advantages of the POP?
- There are no serious side-effects with the POP.
- It doesn’t interfere with sex.
- You can use it if you are breastfeeding.
- It is useful if you cannot take oestrogens, like those found in the combined pill.
- You can use it at any age, but it is especially useful if you are over 35 and you smoke.
- It may help with pre-menstrual tension and painful periods.

What are the disadvantages of the POP?
- You may not have regular periods while you are taking the POP. Your periods may stop altogether or be irregular, light, or more frequent. This may settle down and is not harmful but you may find it annoying. You may also worry that you are pregnant. If you are in any doubt, see your doctor or nurse. Changing to a different POP may help.
- The POP does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections, so you may need to use condoms as well.
- You have to remember to take the pill at the same time every day.

You may get some temporary side-effects when you first start taking the POP; these should stop within a few months. They include:
- spotty skin
- breast tenderness
- weight gain
- headaches.
Are there any risks?
The POP is a very safe pill to take but there are some risks.

Some women may develop small fluid-filled cysts on their ovaries. These are not dangerous and do not usually need to be removed. Often there are no symptoms, but some women may have pelvic pain. These cysts usually disappear without treatment.

If you do become pregnant while you are taking the POP there is a small increased risk of you having an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy develops outside your womb, usually in a fallopian tube. Although this is not common, it is dangerous. This risk of ectopic pregnancy is less in women using the POP than in women using no contraception at all.

Research about the risk of breast cancer, cervical cancer and hormonal contraception is complex and contradictory. Current research suggests that all users of hormonal contraception appear to have a small increase in risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to non-users of hormonal contraception. Further research is ongoing. All risks and benefits should be discussed with your doctor or nurse.

How do I start the POP?
You can start the POP anytime in your menstrual cycle if you are sure you are not pregnant.

If you start the POP on the first day of your menstrual cycle (1st day of your period) you will be protected against pregnancy immediately.

New advice says that you can also start the POP up to and including the fifth day of your menstrual cycle and you will be protected from pregnancy straight away. However, if you have a short menstrual cycle with your period coming
every 23 days or less, starting the POP as late as the fifth day of your cycle may not provide you with immediate contraceptive protection. This is because you may release an egg (ovulate) early in your menstrual cycle. You may wish to talk to your doctor or nurse about this and whether you need to use an additional contraceptive method for the first two days.

If you start the POP at any other time in your menstrual cycle you will need to use another contraceptive method for the first two days of your pill taking.

How do I take the POP?
When taking your first pill choose a convenient time to take it. This can be anytime of the day.

Once you have chosen a time you must then take one POP each day at this same time until you finish all the pills in the pack.

You then start a new pack the next day so there are no breaks between packs. This means that you will be taking pills during your period.

What if I forget to take it on time?
For your pill to work it is important not to take it more than three hours (12 hours for Cerazette) after your chosen time. If you remember later than this, don't panic, the section "What do I do if I forget a pill" (page 8) tells you what to do.

What if I want to change to a different pill?
If you are changing to another POP or from the combined pill you may be advised to start the new pill immediately or start the day after you take your last pill. Do not have a break between packs. There is no need to wait for your period. You will then continue to have protection against becoming pregnant.