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## Contraception - the mini pill

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### Summary

- Oral hormonal contraception is very effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy, when used correctly.
  - The two types of oral contraception available in Australia are the combined pill, known as 'the pill', and the mini pill.
  - Oral contraception does not provide protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The best way to reduce the risk of STIs is to use barrier protection such as condoms and dams with all new sexual partners.
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There are two types of oral contraception available in Australia – **the combined pill, known as 'the pill'**, and the mini pill. The pill contains the hormones oestrogen and progestogen. The mini pill contains only progestogen. Both are taken daily, and are available on prescription. They are very effective forms of contraception if used correctly.

### What is the mini pill?

The mini pill contains the hormone progestogen. It is also known as the progestogen-only pill. Progestogen is similar to a hormone produced by the ovaries.

### How effective is the mini pill?

Taken correctly, the mini pill is at least 99 per cent effective at preventing pregnancy. Allowing for mistakes, it is 93 per cent effective .

### What stops the mini pill from working?

The mini pill might not work if:

- you miss a pill or take it more than three hours late
- you vomit within three hours of taking it
- you have very severe diarrhoea
- you are taking some medications or natural remedies (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

### How do I use the mini pill?

You take it by swallowing one pill around the same time every day. The pack contains 28 hormone pills. There are no sugar pills.

### How does the mini pill work?

The mini pill works by thickening the fluid around the cervix (opening to the uterus or womb). This helps to prevent the sperm from entering.

Sometimes the mini pill can also stop the ovaries from releasing an egg.

When you are starting the mini pill for the first time, or after a break from the mini pill, it can take up to three days to start working. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about the best way to get started.

### Where can I get the mini pill?

Your doctor can provide a script which you can take to the pharmacy. It will be cheaper if you have a healthcare card.

### What is good about the mini pill?

The mini pill:

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- starts working quickly
- is a low dose of hormone
- is another choice if you have difficulty taking the hormone oestrogen. 'The pill' (combined pill) and vaginal ring contain oestrogen and progestogen. The mini pill only contains progestogen
- can be used while breast feeding.

Once you stop using the mini pill your fertility quickly returns to normal.

### **Are there any side effects from taking the mini pill?**

Possible side effects for a small number of users can include:

- irregular vaginal bleeding
- headaches
- sore or tender breasts
- changes to your skin
- mood changes.

These side effects often settle with time. The mini pill has not been shown to cause weight gain.

### **Can the mini pill cause any serious health problems?**

There are no known serious health risks from taking the mini pill.

### **When is the mini pill not a good option?**

The mini pill might not be a good option for you if you:

- find taking a tablet at the same time each day difficult
- have been treated for breast cancer
- have severe liver disease
- are taking certain types of medication which might stop the mini pill from working (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

### **What if I miss a mini pill?**

If you miss a mini pill:

- Take the missed pill as soon as you notice (this may mean taking two pills on the same day), and continue to take your pills as normal.
- Use condoms for the next three days.
- If you have had unprotected sex since you missed your pill, you may need emergency contraception.

### **What happens if I get pregnant while I'm taking the mini pill?**

The pill won't harm the pregnancy. It is safe to continue the pregnancy (and stop the mini pill) or to have an abortion.

### **Can I take the mini pill after I've had a baby?**

You can start the mini pill straight after you give birth, even if you are breastfeeding.

### **What if I'm taking the mini pill and I want to become pregnant?**

You can stop the mini pill at any time and your fertility will quickly return.

### **What else should I know about the mini pill?**

The mini pill:

- does not protect you from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The best way to reduce the risk of STIs is to use barrier protection such as condoms and dams with all new sexual partners

- can be obtained in small quantities from your pharmacist. If you run out of pills and cannot see a doctor for a new script, speak to a pharmacist. They can often give you a small supply of pills without a script. If possible show them your old pill packet.

### Where to get help

- **1800 my options** (Tel. **1800 696 784**) can provide information on the phone about services which provide contraception
- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Pharmacist**
- Many community health services and some public hospitals will have a family planning clinic, a sexual health clinic or women's health clinic providing contraception
- **Family Planning Victoria** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages Tel. **1800 013 952** or **(03) 9257 0100**
- Private clinics offering abortion also offer contraceptive services

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Family Planning Victoria

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