Contraception – the combined pill
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.

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 pill?**

The pill is a daily tablet (also known as the combined pill or oral contraceptive pill). The pill contains two hormones – oestrogen and progestogen. These are similar to hormones that are produced by the ovaries.

**How effective is the pill?**

If used correctly the pill is at least 99 per cent effective at preventing pregnancy. If you miss a pill, vomit within two hours of taking a pill, have severe diarrhoea or take certain medications, it might only be 93 per cent effective.

**What stops the pill from working?**

The pill may not work if:

- it is taken more than 24 hours late
- you vomit within two 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 pill?**

You use the pill by swallowing one pill around the same time every day.

There are many different brands of the pill. Most come in a 28-day pack that includes both hormone and sugar pills. Speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice about which brand is most suitable for you.

You will usually have your period (bleeding from your vagina) while taking the sugar pills. You can skip your period by missing the sugar pills and continuing to take the hormone pills each day.

**How does the pill work?**

The pill works by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg each month.

It also thickens the fluid around the cervix (opening to the uterus/womb) to prevent the sperm from entering.

When you start the pill for the first time, or after a break from the pill, it can take up to 12 days to start working to prevent pregnancy. This depends on whether you start with the hormone pill or sugar pill. Speak with a doctor, nurse or pharmacist about the best way to start taking the pill.

**Where can I get the pill?**

Your doctor can provide a script for the pill which you can take to the pharmacy. Some brands may be more expensive than other brands. Some brands will be cheaper if you have a healthcare card.

**What is good about the pill?**

The pill can:
- be used to skip your period
- make your periods become lighter, more regular, and less painful
- improve acne
- reduce the chance of you getting cancer of the uterus (womb) and ovaries
- help with symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis.

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

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

Possible side effects for a small number of people who take the pill can include:

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

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

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

The pill causes a very small increase in your risk of deep vein thrombosis (blood clot), heart attack or stroke.

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

The pill may not be a good option for you if you:

- find remembering to take a daily tablet difficult
- have certain types of migraine or headache
- are very overweight
- have a close family member who has had a deep vein thrombosis
- are taking certain types of medication which might stop the pill from working (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist)
- have had some health conditions such as high blood pressure, heart or liver disease (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist)
- are over 35 years and smoke
- have been treated for breast cancer
- are unable to move around for a long time (for example, because of surgery or disability).

**What if I miss a pill?**

If you miss a pill:

- Take the missed pill as soon as you notice (this may mean taking two pills on the same day).
- Continue to take your pills as normal.
- Use condoms for the next seven days.
- If you have had sex without a condom in the seven days before missing a pill, you may need emergency contraception or you may need to skip your next sugar pills and start a new pill pack in the hormone section. This depends on where you are up to in the pill packet (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

**What happens if I get pregnant while I’m taking the pill?**

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

**Can I take the pill after I’ve had a baby?**

If you are breastfeeding, do not use the pill until your baby is six weeks old. After six weeks you can use the pill but other types of contraception might be better choices (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

If you are not breastfeeding, you can start using the pill once your baby is three weeks old (check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist).

**What if I’m taking the pill and I want to become pregnant?**

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

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

The pill:

- does not protect you from sexually transmissible infections (STIs)
- can sometimes be supplied in small quantities by your pharmacist, without a prescription. 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 a range of private and public clinics and services which offer various types of 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
- **Family Planning Victoria** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100
- **Family Planning Victoria Action Centre** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages, with an afternoon drop-in clinic for people under 25 years of age Tel. (03) 9660 4700 or 1800 013

References


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Sexual health

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Sexual health basics
- Sexual relationships
- Sexuality and sexual identity
- Sex education
- Sexual assault and abuse
- Contraception and abortion
- Sexual issues throughout life
- Health conditions and sexual issues

Sexual health basics

- Contraception - condoms for men
  Condoms are the most effective way to reduce your risk of contracting a sexually transmissible infection (STI) during sex.
- Contraception - condoms for women
  The female condom is effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy and protecting against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).
- Contraception - choices
  The method of contraception you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships.
- Contraception - emergency contraception
  It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours (four days).
- Masturbation
  Masturbation is a normal and healthy way for people to explore their own bodies.
- Safe sex
  Safe sex is sexual contact that doesn't involve the exchange of semen, vaginal fluids or blood between partners.
- Sex – are you ready
  It is normal to have mixed feelings about having sex with someone else.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
  It is not difficult to avoid catching sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Women's sexual and reproductive health (video)
  Find out some facts about women's sexual and reproductive health - including fertility, contraception, menopause, parental consent and conditions (such as PCOS and endometriosis).

Sexual relationships

- Partying safely and sex
  Partying is fun but being out of it on alcohol or drugs can put you at risk of unwanted or unsafe sex.

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Safe sex
Safe sex is sexual contact that doesn't involve the exchange of semen, vaginal fluids or blood between partners.

Sex – are you ready
It is normal to have mixed feelings about having sex with someone else.

Time to immunise - free vaccines for men who have sex with men
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Women's sexual and reproductive health (video)
Find out some facts about women's sexual and reproductive health - including fertility, contraception, menopause, parental consent and conditions (such as PCOS and endometriosis).

Sexuality and sexual identity

Bisexuality
Bisexuality is when a person finds men and women physically, sexually or emotionally attractive.

Family violence and the LGBTIQ communities
Within Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence. Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as...

Gay male sexuality
There is no real explanation as to why some men are gay and others are not; it is just part of the wide variety of human sexuality.

Lesbian sexuality
Many women report they have lesbian experiences or feelings, but do not think of themselves as lesbians.

Men and sexuality
Sexuality is not about whom we have sex with, or how often we have it. Sexuality is about our sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people. We can find other people...

Mental health and wellbeing support for LGBTI people
If you or someone you know requires support from an LGBTI or mental health organisation there are services available...

Sex explained
Sexuality is not about whom we have sex with, or how often we have it. Sexuality is about our sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people. We can find other people...

Switchboard (Victoria)
The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard (Victoria) is a telephone helpline that gives advice, information, counselling and referrals to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) people in...

Trans and gender diverse people
Your gender is what feels natural to you, even if it is different from your biological sex. Some people may not feel comfortable with their biological sex but choose to live with the gender with which...

Women and sexuality
Most girls start puberty around 10 years old, but it can be earlier or later than that. Your body will go through big changes as you change from a girl into a young woman. For some girls (and women)...

Sex education

Sex education – tips for parents
Mothers are more likely to talk about intimate, emotional and psychological aspects of sex than fathers.

Talking to children with cognitive disability about sex
All people, including those with cognitive disabilities, have the right to explore and express their sexuality in appropriate ways.

Talking to pre-schoolers about sex
By four, most children are curious about certain sexual issues, and they need honest answers to their questions.
Talking to primary school children about sex
Some parents find it hard to talk with their primary age children about sex, but help is available...

Talking to young people about sex
Talking about sex with your child is easier if you start when your child is young...

Talking to young people with cognitive disabilities about sex
Young people with cognitive disabilities have the same range of sexual feelings and desires as young people without disabilities...

Women's sexual and reproductive health (video)
Find out some facts about women's sexual and reproductive health - including fertility, contraception, menopause, parental consent and conditions (such as PCOS and endometriosis)...

Sexual assault and abuse

Date rape
Date rape can be especially common among young people who have had little sexual experience and aren’t sure that what they have experienced crosses the line into rape. Many victims of date rape can...

People with a disability who experience violence, abuse or neglect
People with a disability who experience violence, abuse or neglect can seek help from a range of services specifically designed to help them...

Recognising when a child is at risk
Too many children are physically, sexually and emotionally abused and when this happens, it is up to adults to speak up...

Sexual abuse
If you suspect sexual abuse or have been told about it by a child, you must report it...

Sexual abuse - helping your child
As a parent, you have an important role in helping your child recover from sexual abuse...

Sexual assault
Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes the victim feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened...

Contraception and abortion

Abortion
All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions...

Abortion procedures - medication
Mifepristone, also called RU486 or the 'abortion pill', is used to terminate (end) a pregnancy up to nine weeks...

Abortion procedures - surgical
Abortion is one of the most common and safest types of surgery in Australia...

Contraception after an abortion
Whether you have a surgical or medical abortion you can become fertile again very soon after the abortion, so it's important to start using contraception immediately if you wish to prevent any...

Contraception after giving birth
After having a baby, you need to choose an effective method of contraception if you don't want to have another baby straight away...

Contraception - choices
The method of contraception you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships...

Contraception - condoms for men
Condoms are the most effective way to reduce your risk of contracting a sexually transmissible infection (STI) during sex...

Contraception - condoms for women
The female condom is effective in preventing an unplanned pregnancy and protecting against sexually transmissible infections (STIs)...

Contraception – the combined pill
betterhealth.vic.gov.au
The diaphragm acts as a barrier method of contraception.

- **Contraception - emergency contraception**
  It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours (four days).

- **Contraception - implants and injections**
  Hormonal contraception for women is available as implants or injections that slowly release hormones into the body over time.

- **Contraception - injections for men**
  Contraceptive injections for men are not yet available in Australia, but clinical studies suggest that they may provide a safe, effective and reversible method of male contraception in the future.

- **Contraception - intrauterine devices (IUD)**
  An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small contraceptive device that is put into the uterus (womb) to prevent pregnancy.

- **Contraception - Louna’s lowdown on emergency contraception (video)**
  This video was made by the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia, with Louna Maroun to inform teenagers about this safe, effective form of contraception to prevent an unplanned pregnancy.

- **Contraception - the combined pill**
  The two types of oral contraception available in Australia are the combined pill, known as the Pill, and the mini pill.

- **Contraception - the mini pill**
  The two types of oral contraception available in Australia are the combined pill, known as "the Pill", and the mini pill.

- **Contraception - tubal ligation**
  Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that a woman can choose if she is sure that she does not want children in the future.

- **Contraception - vaginal ring**
  The vaginal ring works in a similar way to the oral contraceptive pill to prevent pregnancy.

- **Contraception - vasectomy**
  Having a vasectomy does not affect a man's ability to produce male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.

- **Pregnancy - unplanned**
  When a woman does not want to become a parent, her pregnancy options may include abortion or adoption.

**Sexual issues throughout life**

- **Cognitive disability and sexuality**
  People with intellectual disability can express their sexuality in satisfying ways.

- **Menopause and sexual issues**
  Menopause, the final menstrual period, is a natural event that marks the end of a woman's reproductive years.

- **Physical disability and sexuality**
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support.

- **Puberty**
  Adjusting to the many changes that happen around puberty can be difficult for both parents and young people.

- **Sex and chronic illness**
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support.

**Health conditions and sexual issues**

- **Brain injury and sexual issues**
  A brain injury can change the way a person experiences and expresses their sexuality.

- **Cognitive disability and sexuality**
People with intellectual disability can express their sexuality in satisfying ways...

- Diabetes and erectile dysfunction
  Men with diabetes are more prone to problems with erectile dysfunction or impotence...

- HIV and men - safer sex
  HIV transmission can occur from men to women and from women to men as well as between men who have sex with men...

- HIV and women – having children
  Women living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), or women whose partner is HIV-positive, may wish to have children but feel concerned about the risk of transmission of the virus to themselves if...

- HIV and women – safer sex
  Practising safe sex is important, whether your partner is HIV-positive or not...

- Parkinson's disease and sexual issues
  Communication is the best remedy for all types of relationship problems, including sexual problems caused by Parkinson’s disease...

- Physical disability and sexuality
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support...

- Sex and chronic illness
  Sexuality is a key part of human nature. Expressing sexuality in satisfying ways is important for everyone, including people with a disability. Some people with disability may need additional support...

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- Contraception - diaphragms
  The diaphragm acts as a barrier method of contraception...

- Contraception after giving birth
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- National Prescribing Service - Medicine Update.
- Reach Out.
- The Royal Women’s Hospital.

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