

Progesterone-Only Oral Contraceptives (Minipills)

Live Well to
Learn Well

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Appointments:
Monday–Saturday

*Check web for hours,
services, providers,
and appointment
information*

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What are minipills?

Minipills are progesterone-only birth control pills (i.e. they contain no estrogen). The progesterone affects the mucus around the cervix and makes it harder for sperm to enter the uterus. It also affects the transport of the egg through the fallopian tubes to prevent fertilization, and can inhibit ovulation in some people.

Minipills are more than 95% effective, slightly less than regular birth control pills. As with all hormonal-based contraceptives, minipills do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Why use minipills?

Minipills have no estrogen, so they are an alternative method for women who experience significant side-effects with regular birth control pills and/or have medical conditions that prevent them from using pills containing estrogen.

Is the minipill right for you?

Advantages

Many women choose the minipill because it :

- permits sexual spontaneity
- avoids the typical side effects of birth control pills with estrogen
- is safe for breast-feeding mothers
- is safe for women with medical contraindications to estrogen

Disadvantages

Minipills:

- must be taken every day at the same time
- do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- are less effective when taken with some drugs (be sure to discuss any medications with a clinician)
- may cause irregular bleeding
- are less forgiving of missed or late pills than are birth control pills containing estrogen

Side-effects

The most common side-effect for women using minipills is irregular bleeding. While many women on minipills have normal periods, others have irregular periods, spotting between periods, or no period at all.

Instructions for use

Minipills come in packs of 28, and one is taken every day. Unlike other birth control pills, there are no placebo pills in the minipill packs.



Minipills may be a good option for women who can't use birth control pills containing estrogen.

Starting minipills:

There are two options for starting minipills:

1. Take the first pill within the first 5 days of a normal period beginning. The pill will be immediately effective this way.
2. Start any time. You'll need a back-up method for two days.

Continue to take one pill daily, at the same time of the day, even during your period. For optimal effectiveness, minipills should be taken at the exact same time every day.

After the first pack:

As soon as you finish one pack, begin the next one. Start your next pack even if you are still bleeding or have not started your menstrual period. Continue taking one pill every day.

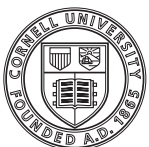
Some users may ovulate every month. For others, ovulation may vary from month to month. Some women may never ovulate and go months without any bleeding.

Unlike other birth control pills, there is a greater chance of unplanned pregnancy if a minipill is forgotten (not taken) or is taken late. You can improve the effectiveness of the minipill by using a backup method, like condoms.

Warning signs

If you experience any of the following, call Cornell Health for consultation:

- abdominal pain: may be due to an ovarian cyst or an ectopic pregnancy (don't stop pills, but contact us right away)
- repeated, very severe headaches



- severe leg or arm pain or numbness
- if your menstrual bleeding pattern concerns you, call Cornell Health for an appointment to discuss with a clinician
- if while on the minipill you do not menstruate for 60 days, call Cornell Health to arrange for a pregnancy test but continue taking your pills

Late or missed minipills

If it has been more than 3 hours since you were supposed to take your pill, take it right away and use a back-up method of contraception for the next 48 hours.

If you miss 1 minipill (e.g. yesterday's minipill), take it as soon as you remember. Also take today's minipill at the regular time, even if that means taking two pills in 1 day. Use your back-up method of birth control for the next 2 days (48 hours).

If you miss 2 or more pills in a row, your pregnancy protection is decreased. Immediately start using your back-up method. Restart your minipills right away, and take 2 pills a day for 2 days. If your menstrual period does not begin within 4 to 6 weeks, see your clinician for an exam and pregnancy test.

If you have already had intercourse without adequate protection because you missed pills, you may be able to use Emergency Contraception (EC) to prevent pregnancy. Call Cornell Health to discuss your options with a clinician.

When to use back-up protection

- **During the first cycle of taking minipills**, you may forget pills or take them late, so a back-up method may make you feel more confident.
- **If late periods make you feel anxious**, a back-up method may help you feel more secure.
- **If you are 3 or more hours late taking a minipill**, use a back-up contraceptive for 48 hours until you are back on schedule. If you are concerned about pregnancy, consider Emergency Contraception (EC).
- **To protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**, use condoms or other latex barriers consistently, even while using the minipills.

How to get a prescription

Make an appointment at Cornell Health. Ask for a well-woman visit if it is time for a pap smear and/or check-up. Ask for an appointment just for birth control if you feel you don't need a check-up, pap smear or STI testing. At your appointment, the clinician will talk with you more about minipills and other contraceptive options.

Picking up your pills

Your minipill prescription can be filled at Cornell Health's pharmacy (Monday – Saturday during business hours). No appointment is needed for pick-up. Be sure to have your next pack ready several days before finishing your current pack.

If you are already using minipills

If you are currently using minipills and want to have your prescription renewals managed at Cornell Health, please make an appointment with a clinician before you run out of pills. We encourage women to consider making an appointment for a well woman visit if a check up, pap smear, or STI screening is needed. However, you may choose to refill your minipills without having an exam by making a "contraception only" appointment.

The clinicians and sexual health nurses at Cornell Health can talk with you about any concerns you may have about minipills, other birth control methods, and/or reducing risks of STIs and/or testing. Request an appointment via phone (607 255-5155), online via myCornellHealth or by visiting us during business hours.

Additional considerations

No hormonal method of birth control protects against sexually transmitted infections (STI) including HIV. Latex barriers (condoms or squares) are the best way for sexually active people to protect themselves against STIs when you or your partner have had other sex partners. Condoms, lubricants, and other sexual health products can be purchased at the Cornell Health Pharmacy.