

## The Mini Pill

### What is it?

The mini pill contains only progestogen - a female hormone. The dosage is very small and each pill in the packet is the same. Unlike the combined pill, it has no oestrogen and no sugar (inactive) pills.

### How does it work?

The progestogen makes the cervical mucus thicken. This mucus acts as a plug and prevents the sperm from entering the uterus and travelling to the tube to fertilise the egg. There may be some change to the woman's normal menstrual cycle.

### How effective is it?

It is 96% - 99% effective if taken carefully. It is more effective in older, rather than younger women.

### When to take it?

A pill must be taken **every day** without a break, even during any menstrual blood loss. If the mini pill is started on the first day of the menstrual period it is effective immediately. If the pill is started at any other time of the menstrual cycle, it will be effective after three pills in a row have been taken.

A pill must be taken at the **same time every day**, with only **three hours leeway** either side of the usual time of taking it.

If a pill is forgotten, another form of contraception (e.g. condoms) must be used until three further pills in a row have been taken.

If a woman has unprotected sex after missing even a single mini pill, and does not wish to become pregnant, she can take emergency contraception as soon as possible.

Emergency contraception is available over the counter without a prescription at pharmacies. (See also the FPV Emergency Contraception pamphlet for more detailed information or phone a Family Planning clinic.)

### Who might it suit?

- Women who get side effects from the combined pill such as headaches, high blood pressure, weight gain or nausea.
- Women who are breastfeeding - the mini pill has little or no effect on the breast milk; only a tiny amount passes to the baby and is not known to be harmful. (See also the FPV Post Natal Contraception pamphlet.)

- Women who are unable to take oestrogen for health reasons - over 35 and smokers, those with heart disease and those who have had blood clots in the past.
- Women who want the lowest possible dose of hormones.

### **Possible disadvantages**

- There is an increased chance of spotting between periods, prolonged periods, irregular periods, heavier periods or no periods.
- Other drugs, including complementary remedies, can interfere with the mini pill. For example St John's Wort should not be taken by mini pill users. Advice must be sought when taking other medications.
- The mini pill does not protect against sexually transmissible infections. For protection against STIs, use condoms and 'dental' dams. A dam is a thin latex sheet placed over (any part of) the body for safer oral sex.

Taking the pill at the same time every day can be difficult. If you have trouble with this, another method may be better for you. Setting your alarm on your mobile phone or clock, or placing your pills next to your tooth brush can help. If you have missed or are late with a pill, or have had vomiting or diarrhoea, it is only three pills (48 hours) until you are covered again.



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