



What You Should Know About The Minipill Or Progestin-Only Birth Control Pills

What are they? Minipills are contraceptive pills that do not contain estrogen like “regular” birth control pills. They contain only a progestin which when taken correctly have an effectiveness of about 95% compared to 99% with the combined estrogen and progestin birth control pills.

How do they work? Minipills work in several ways: thickening and decreasing cervical mucus and preventing sperm penetration, altering transport in the fallopian tubes, altering the uterine lining so it is less favorable for pregnancy, and sometimes inhibiting ovulation.

When can they be started? Minipills can be started as early as 4 weeks postpartum in breastfeeding mothers without affecting milk production or the quality of breast milk. Otherwise, they can be started at any time once pregnancy has been ruled out.

How to take them: Minipills must be taken every day continuously **within an hour of the same time every day** to be effective. Whenever a pill is taken late, back-up birth control must be used for 48 hours. It is important not to miss pills.

How soon are they effective? Minipills are effective after the first month of use (28 tablets). Back-up birth control should be used until then.

What will periods be like on the minipill? You might have regular periods, irregular spotting, or no bleeding at all on the minipill. Unlike “regular” birth control pills, you do not have a pill-free or placebo week. Your period will soon return to normal after your pills are discontinued. Your ability to get pregnant returns right away after stopping minipills.

Warning signs: You should report severe lower abdominal pain, repeated very severe headaches or a delayed period after several cycles of regular periods on the minipill.