

Fact Sheet Compiled by: Monica McDonald  
Last Updated: June 23, 2023  
Fact Sheet Reviewed by: Cheri Asa



## Progestin-only Birth Control Pills

### Active Ingredient

Norethindrone

### Product Type

Progestin

### Manufacturer

List of commercially available [progestin-only birth control pills](#)

### Product information

Progestin-only birth control pills (also known as the "minipill") are an oral contraceptive that contains the synthetic hormone norethindrone. Unlike combination birth control pills, this formulation contains no estrogen and the progestin dose is lower than that in a combination birth control pill. As is the case with other progestin-based contraception, the minipill thickens cervical mucus and thins the lining of the uterus (endometrium), preventing sperm from reaching the egg. The minipill also suppresses ovulation, but not consistently. For maximum effectiveness, the minipill must be administered at the same time every day.

### Safety to humans

There is no health risk to humans when administered as directed.

### Latency to effectiveness

Although individuals vary, threshold levels of the hormone should be reached in the blood within 1 to 3 days of starting this product. However, pre-ovulatory follicles are difficult to suppress, so, if cycle stage is not known, extra time must be allowed. Therefore, separation or alternative contraception should be used for 1-2 weeks after initiation of treatment.

### Signs of estrus during treatment

Synthetic progestins may achieve contraception by blocking ovulation, causing thickening of cervical mucus, slowing ovum transport, and/or interfering with fertilization or implantation. However, follicle growth may continue and sometimes be accompanied by estrogen production sufficient to cause estrous behavior. Ovulation may occur even though pregnancy does not ensue. Higher progestin doses may be preferred so that estrous behavior is prevented, but may not be effective in completely suppressing follicle growth and all estrogen production.

### Duration of efficacy and reversibility

Progestin-only pills should be given daily. If a pill is missed, give the missed pill as soon as possible, even if it means giving two pills in one day. If more than one pill is missed, the female should be separated

from males. Following cessation of treatment, the hormones are cleared quickly, and conception may occur within the first weeks for some individuals.

#### **Use during pregnancy**

Progestin-only pills are not recommended in pregnant animals because of the possibility of prolonged gestation in some species, although the effect may depend on dose.

#### **Use during lactation**

Progestin-only pills are sometimes prescribed for lactating women and are considered generally safe for nursing infants.

#### **Consideration for seasonal breeders**

Treatment should begin at least 1 month before the anticipated onset of the breeding season.

#### **Reporting Requirements**

All institutions using this product are asked to contribute contraception information for their animals to the AZA Reproductive Management Center's Contraception Database (<https://www.zoocontraceptiondata.org>). It is essential that accurate records of doses and treatment intervals be maintained, and results reported, to contribute to dosage development.

#### **For questions about the RMC Contraception Database, contact:**

Ashley Franklin, Program Analyst  
AZA Reproductive Management Center  
One Government Drive  
Saint Louis, MO 63110  
301-956-0171; fax: 314-646-5534  
[franklin@stlzoo.org](mailto:franklin@stlzoo.org)