Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Norethindrone

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Aygestin [DSC]; Camila; Deblitane; Emzahh; Errin; Gallifrey; Heather; Incassia; Jencycla; Lyleq; Lyza; Meleya; Nora-BE; Norlyroc; Orquidea; Sharobel

Brand Names: Canada

Jencycla; Maeve; Movisse; Norlutate

Warning

- Smoking cigarettes while using this drug raises the chance of severe heart and blood-related side effects. This chance is raised with age (mainly older than 35 years of age). It is also raised with the number of cigarettes smoked. It is strongly advised not to smoke.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to prevent pregnancy.
- It is used to treat uterine bleeding due to hormonal imbalance.
- It is used to treat endometriosis.
- It is used to treat people who do not have a monthly period cycle.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you are pregnant or may be pregnant. Do not take this drug if you are pregnant.
- If you have had any of these health problems: Bleeding disorder; blood clots or risk of having a blood clot; breast cancer; liver disease; liver tumors; recent heart attack; or recent stroke.
- If you have had any of these health problems: Cancer of the uterus, ovary, cervix, or vagina; or vaginal bleeding where the cause is not known.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

All products:

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- This drug may raise the chance of blood clots, a stroke, or a heart attack. Talk with the doctor.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your blood sugar closely.
- Be sure to have regular breast exams and gynecology check-ups. You will also need to do breast self-exams as you have been told.

- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers and lab workers that you take this drug.
- If you have any signs of pregnancy or if you have a positive pregnancy test, call your doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

Birth control:

- Certain drugs, herbal products, or health problems may cause hormone-based birth control to not work as well. Be sure your doctor knows about all of your drugs and health problems. You will need to see if you also need to use a non-hormone form of birth control like condoms.
- This drug does not protect against infections that are spread through having sex like HIV or hepatitis. To protect against these infections, use a latex or polyurethane condom.
- Some studies have shown the risk of breast cancer is raised when taking birth control pills, especially at a younger age. The risk was also linked to how long the birth control pills were taken. One study showed the risk was also raised in those who took birth control pills within the past 10 years.
- The chance of getting cervical cancer may be higher in people who take hormone-based birth control. However, this may be due to other reasons. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- The chance of pregnancy outside the uterus (ectopic pregnancy) may be raised in some people. If you have questions, talk with the doctor. Get medical help right away if you have signs like vaginal bleeding; upset stomach or throwing up; stomach pain; pelvic or rectal pain; shoulder or neck pain; dizziness; passing out; fast heartbeat; pale, sweaty, or clammy skin; confusion; or other severe or unusual effects.
- Do not use in children who have not had their first menstrual period.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of liver problems like dark urine, tiredness, decreased appetite, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
- Stomach pain.
- Very bad dizziness or passing out.
- Eyesight changes or loss, bulging eyes, or change in how contact lenses feel.
- A lump in the breast, breast pain or soreness, or nipple discharge.
- Vaginal itching or discharge.
- Vaginal bleeding that is not normal.
- Depression or other mood changes.
- Swelling.
- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of a blood clot like chest pain or pressure; coughing up blood; shortness of breath; swelling, warmth, numbness, change of color, or pain in a leg or arm; or trouble speaking or swallowing.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

All products:

- Dizziness or headache.
- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Cramps.
- Bloating.
- Tender breasts.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Pimples (acne).
- Weight gain.
- This drug may cause dark patches of skin on your face. Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and wear clothing and eyewear that protects you from the sun.

Birth control:

- Period (menstrual) changes. These include spotting or bleeding between cycles.

Hormone therapy (HT):

- Vaginal bleeding or spotting.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

All products:

- Take tablet with or without food. Take with food if it causes an upset stomach.

Birth control:

- If you throw up or have diarrhea, this drug may not work as well to prevent pregnancy. Use an extra form of birth control, like condoms, until you check with your doctor.
- Do not skip doses, even if you are spotting, bleeding, or feel sick to your stomach.
- If you miss 2 periods in a row, take a pregnancy test before starting a new dosing cycle.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

Birth control:

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it and go back to your normal time.
- If you miss a dose by more than 3 hours, you must use another form of birth control, like a condom or spermicide, for the next 48 hours.
- If you are not sure what to do if you miss a dose, call your doctor.

Hormone therapy (HT):

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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