



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Norgestrel

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

Opill

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to prevent pregnancy. If you have been given this drug for some other reason, talk with your doctor for more information.

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 have ever had breast cancer or another cancer where hormones make it grow.
- If you have any of these health problems: Liver disease or liver tumors.
- If you have unexplained vaginal bleeding.
- If you are taking birth control pills or some other hormone-based birth control.
- If you have taken ulipristal (an emergency contraceptive) in the last 5 days.
- If you are pregnant or may be pregnant. Do not take this drug if you are pregnant.
- If you are a male. This drug is not approved for use in males.

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?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- This drug does not prevent pregnancy if taken after unprotected sex. If you have questions, talk with your 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.
- 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.
- If you are allergic to tartrazine (FD&C Yellow No. 5), talk with your doctor. Some products have tartrazine.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers and lab workers that you take this drug.
- Ovarian cysts may rarely happen. Most of the time, these go back to normal in 2 to 3 months. Sometimes, ovarian cysts can cause pain and the need for surgery. Talk with the doctor.

- Menstrual periods may stop in some people taking this drug. Tell your doctor if you do not have a menstrual period for 2 months after having normal periods.
- If you get pregnant while taking this drug, the chance of pregnancy outside of the uterus (ectopic pregnancy) may be raised. Talk with your doctor.
- 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.

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.
- Very bad headache.
- Sudden or severe long-lasting stomach pain (mostly on one side).
- Spotting or vaginal bleeding that is very bad or does not go away.
- A lump in the breast, breast pain or soreness, or nipple discharge.

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:

- Period (menstrual) changes. These include spotting or bleeding between cycles.
- Headache.
- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Upset stomach.
- Increased appetite.
- Stomach pain or cramps.
- Bloating.
- Vaginal discharge.
- Feeling nervous and excitable.
- Back pain.
- Pimples (acne).

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.

- Be sure you know when to start taking this drug. If you are not sure when to

start taking this drug, talk with your doctor.

- After starting this drug, you may need to use a non-hormone type of birth control like condoms to prevent pregnancy for some time. Follow what your doctor has told you to do about using a non-hormone type of birth control.
- Take this drug at the same time of day.
- Do not skip doses, even if you do not have sex very often.
- If you miss 2 periods in a row, take a pregnancy test before starting a new dosing cycle.
- If you throw up or have diarrhea, this drug may not work as well to prevent pregnancy. If this happens within 3 to 4 hours after you take an active tablet, take another tablet. If it goes on for more than 1 day, use an extra form of birth control and call your doctor. Call your doctor if you throw up or have diarrhea and are not sure what to do.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- If a dose is missed, check the package insert or call the doctor to find out what to do. If using this drug to prevent pregnancy, a non-hormone form of birth control like condoms may need to be used for some time to prevent pregnancy.

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>.

Last Reviewed Date

2023-07-26

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

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.

Norgestrel - Last updated on July 29, 2023

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center