

## What You Should Know About Breastfeeding

Breastmilk is the best food for your baby. In fact, your baby will get everything she/he needs if you feed only breastmilk for at least four months.

You can make enough milk to meet your baby's needs, even if you do not get enough to eat. Normal breastmilk looks thin and watery, but it gives a growing baby a complete meal.

You can avoid or delay another pregnancy safely while you breastfeed. Breastfeeding provides 98 percent protection against pregnancy if your menstrual bleeding has not resumed, if you exclusively breastfeed, and if your baby is less than six months old. It is important that you exclusively breastfeed for *all* meals—both during the day and at night.

Nearly all family planning methods, except those that contain the hormone estrogen, are safe during breastfeeding.

The Population Council's Robert H. Ebert Program on Critical Issues in Reproductive Health, established in 1988, responds to an awareness that many important reproductive health problems—and the ways women experience them—have been neglected by policy-makers, program planners, and practitioners. Currently the Program focuses on several areas that merit special attention: improving the quality of services in reproductive health programs, managing unwanted pregnancy and preventing the consequences of unsafe abortion, devising new approaches to postpartum care to meet the health needs of the mother and child, and designing programs that address sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, within the larger context of women's reproductive health.

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## What You Should Know About Breastfeeding and the Progestin-Only Pill Information for Women

***The Progestin-Only Pill is the most effective woman-controlled family planning method that is safe during breastfeeding and is easy to use***

*Although non-breastfeeding women can safely use progestin-only oral contraceptive pills (POPs), POPs are especially useful for women who breastfeed. POPs work together with breastfeeding to protect you from pregnancy. POPs will not affect your baby's growth, or affect the amount and quality of your milk. Unlike combined birth control pills, POPs contain no estrogen, a hormone that could interfere with breastmilk production.*

## When to start

Before your baby is six weeks old, a non-hormonal contraceptive is best. POPs may be started after the baby reaches six weeks of age.

*If your monthly periods have not returned*, you can start POPs any day after your baby is six weeks old. You will need to use a back-up method or avoid sex for the first two days after starting POPs in order to give POPs time to start working.

*If your monthly periods have returned*, start POPs on the first day of your next monthly period (the first day of bleeding). You will need to use a back-up method or avoid sex for the first two days after starting POPs or after returning to POPs, if you stopped using them for more than one day.

## How to take POPs

Take one pill at the **same time** each evening or day. When you finish one pack, begin another the following day.

### *If you are late or miss taking one or more pills*

Take one as soon as you remember. Take the next one at the usual time. Use a back-up method such as a condom or avoid sex for the next two days, especially if you take your pill more than three hours late. If you forget to take your pills several times, think about whether another family planning method might be easier for you.

## What to expect with your monthly periods

POPs may change your monthly periods. For example, you may go for many months without periods, or your monthly bleeding may appear as a light flow or spots of dark blood. Changes in your monthly periods are normal.

## Stopping POPs

You can use POPs as long as you want, even after you stop breastfeeding. But, POPs are slightly less effective in non-breastfeeding women and must be taken at the same time every day. You can stop POPs at any time in a cycle. However, fertility may return quickly, so use a back-up method as soon as you stop taking POPs if you want to avoid pregnancy.

## Safety of POPs

POPs are very safe. But, they slightly increase the risk of a cyst in your liver or ovaries or a pregnancy outside your womb. If you have abdominal pain, see a health worker. If you get pregnant while taking POPs, have a health worker confirm the pregnancy before stopping POPs. POPs will not harm your baby. Visit a health worker whenever you think you might be pregnant.

## Side effects of POPs

POPs often change monthly periods. The return of your first period after your baby may be delayed. The time between periods may vary from month to month. Bleeding may be lighter. You may have headaches, dizziness, or sore breasts. You may feel sick to your stomach or notice white or clear fluid coming from your vagina.

## Warnings

- See a health worker if you have pain in your abdomen, especially if you think you are pregnant or have missed pills.
- Pills do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. See a health care provider if you think you have, or were exposed to, any sexually transmitted disease.
- POPs are slightly less effective than combined pills once breastfeeding is stopped.