Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand
Waitaha Canterbury

# COMBINED CONTRACEPTIVE TABLETS

## What does it do?

*Combined contraceptive tablets* contain the hormones oestrogen and progestogen, and are used to prevent pregnancy. See Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa for more information. They are also used to treat acne, endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and irregular, painful, or heavy periods.

## Before you start

- It's important to make sure you're not pregnant.
- Women taking *combined contraceptive tablets* may have a small increased chance of blood clots, stroke, heart attacks, and breast cancer. Tell your doctor if you, or someone in your family, has ever had any of these problems. Your chance of these problems may be higher if you are overweight or smoke, or if you have diabetes, migraines, or high blood pressure. Discuss with your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you are breastfeeding.
- *Combined contraceptive tablets* are effective at preventing pregnancy straight away if you start in the first 5 days of your period. If you start after this, you will need to use condoms (or don't have sex) for the next 7 days.

## How should you take it?

Take your tablet regularly at the same time each day. You can take it with or without food.
Your pack has 21 hormone tablets. Some packs also have 7 non-hormone tablets.
You can choose to take your tablets "continuously". To do this, take your 21 hormone tablets, then skip your 7 non-hormone tablets or 7-day break, and start the hormone tablets in your next pack. With this option you won't get your period. You can take your tablets continuously (and not have periods) for as long as you want.

## What if you forget a dose?

Missed 1 hormone tablet and it's over 24 hours late: take it straight away and then your next tablet at the usual time—even if that means 2 tablets at once. You are protected from pregnancy and don't need condoms.

Missed 2 or more hormone tablets: take the last tablet straight away—even if that means 2 tablets at once—then continue as usual. If you take tablets 'continuously' and took them correctly for 7 days before forgetting, you are still protected from pregnancy. If you've missed more than 8 in a row, use condoms or avoid sex for 7 days.
If you take non-hormone tablets or have a 7-day break, use condoms or avoid sex for 7 days. If there are fewer than 7 hormone tablets left in your pack, finish these then start your next pack straight away (skip any non-hormone tablets or break). If you're in the first week of your pack and had unprotected sex you may need emergency contraception—ask your health professional.

If unsure, always check with your health professional.

## Can you take other medicines?

Tell your pharmacist or doctor about all medicines or treatments that you may be taking, including vitamins, herbal products (e.g. St John's wort) or recreational drugs.

## What side effects might you notice?

| Side Effects | Recommended action |
|---|---|
| Symptoms of a blood clot including: sudden shortness of breath, swelling or pain in one leg<br>Symptoms of a stroke including: sudden weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side, face drooping, sudden changes in vision or speech, sudden loss of balance<br>Severe headache<br>Chest pain | Tell your doctor immediately |
| Changes in periods, sore or enlarged breasts<br>Mood changes, headache<br>Nausea, bloating, weight gain<br>Brown patches on the face | Tell your doctor if troublesome |

If you notice any other effects, discuss them with your doctor or pharmacist.

## Other information:

- If you vomit or have very bad diarrhoea within 2 hours of taking your tablet, take another one. If you can't, or the vomiting or diarrhoea continues, use condoms (or don't have sex) until you have taken a hormone tablet for 7 days in a row after the vomiting or diarrhoea has stopped (skip any non-hormone tablets or your 7-day break).
- *Combined contraceptive tablets* do not protect you from sexually transmitted infections.
- Taking *combined contraceptive tablets* doesn't make it harder to get pregnant if you want to later on. You can get pregnant as soon as you stop taking *combined contraceptive tablets*.