

LEVONORGESTREL

Brand names Levonelle 1500, Levonelle One Step, Mirena, Norgeston

Used in the following combined preparations Cyclo-progynova, Logynon ED, Microgynon 30, Ovranette, and others

GENERAL INFORMATION

Levonorgestrel is a synthetic hormone similar to progesterone, a natural female sex hormone. Its primary use is in oral contraceptives. It performs this function by thickening the mucus at the neck of the uterus (cervix), thereby making it difficult for sperm to enter the uterus.

Levonorgestrel is available in combined oral contraceptives (COCs) with an oestrogen drug. It is also given, in a higher dose, as a progestogen-only

preparation (POP), for emergency, postcoital contraception and can be obtained over the counter by women over the age of 16. It is also combined with an oestrogen drug in hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for the short-term treatment of menopausal symptoms (see p.105).

The drug rarely causes serious adverse effects. When it is used alone, menstrual irregularities, especially mid-cycle, or "breakthrough", bleeding may occur.

QUICK REFERENCE

Drug group Female sex hormone (p.105) and oral contraceptive (p.121)

Overdose danger rating Low

Dependence rating Low

Prescription needed Yes (most preparations)

Available as generic No

INFORMATION FOR USERS

Your drug prescription is tailored for you. Do not alter dosage without checking with your doctor.

How taken/used



Tablets, intrauterine device (IUD), patches.

Frequency and timing of doses

Once daily, at the same time each day (tablets).

Adult dosage range

Progestogen-only contraceptive 30mcg daily.

Postcoital contraceptive 1.5mg as a single dose as soon as possible, within 12 hours, but no later than after 72 hours.

HRT and combined oral contraceptive Dosage varies according to preparation used.

Onset of effect

Within 4 hours, but contraceptive protection may not be fully effective for 14 days, depending on day of cycle tablets are started.

Duration of action

24 hours. Some effects, not including contraception, may persist for up to 3 months after levonorgestrel is stopped.

Diet advice

None.

Storage

Keep in original container at room temperature out of the reach of children.

Missed dose

Progestogen-only contraceptive: If a tablet is delayed by 2 hours or more, regard it as a missed dose. See What to do if you miss a pill (p.123). *Postcoital contraceptive:* If vomiting occurs within 3 hours, take another tablet immediately. If problem persists speak to your doctor or pharmacist without delay. *Combined oral contraceptive:* Depends on preparation used. See What to do if you miss a pill (p.123).

Stopping the drug

The drug can be safely stopped as soon as contraceptive protection is no longer required. For treatment of menopausal symptoms, consult your doctor before stopping the drug.

Exceeding the dose

An occasional unintentional extra dose is unlikely to be a cause for concern. But if you notice any unusual symptoms, or if a large overdose has been taken, notify your doctor.

SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS

Be sure to tell your doctor if:

- You have a personal or family history of breast cancer.
- You have liver or kidney problems, heart failure, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, epilepsy, porphyria, or sickle cell anaemia.
- You have abnormal vaginal bleeding.
- You have ever had migraines, severe headaches, blood clots, or a stroke.
- You have a history of depression.
- You are taking other medicines.



Pregnancy

Not prescribed. May cause abnormalities in the developing baby. Discuss with your doctor.



Breast-feeding

The drug passes into the breast milk, but at normal doses adverse effects on the baby are unlikely. Discuss with your doctor.



Infants and children

Not prescribed.



Over 60

Not prescribed.



Driving and hazardous work

No known problems.



Alcohol

No known problems.

Surgery and general anaesthetics

The drug should be stopped before surgery.

POSSIBLE ADVERSE EFFECTS

Menstrual irregularities (blood spotting between menstrual periods or absence of menstruation) are the most common side effects of

levonorgestrel alone. Lower abdominal pain is a rare effect but may indicate pregnancy; consult your doctor promptly.

Symptom/effect	Frequency		Discuss with doctor		Stop taking drug now	Call doctor now
	Common	Rare	Only if severe	In all cases		
Swollen feet/ankles	●		●			
Weight gain	●		●			
Irregular vaginal bleeding	●			●		
Nausea/vomiting		●	●			
Breast tenderness		●	●			
Depression/headache		●		●		
Lower abdominal pain		●		●		●

INTERACTIONS

General note The beneficial effects of many drugs may be affected by levonorgestrel. Many others may reduce

contraceptive protection. Consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking other medications.

PROLONGED USE

In a COC, the drug increases the thrombosis and breast cancer risk but reduces the endometrial and ovarian cancer risk. In a POP, it carries a small increased risk of breast cancer. As part of HRT, it increases the risk of thrombosis and breast cancer. HRT is advised only for short-term use around the menopause.

Monitoring Blood pressure checks, physical examination, and mammograms may be performed.