

ETHINYLESTRADIOL

Used in the following combined preparations Co-cyprindiol, combined oral contraceptives (e.g. Brevinor, Femodene, Loestrin, Marvelon, Mercilon, Microgynon 30, Norimin, Ovranette, Ovysmen, Yasmin), Dianette

GENERAL INFORMATION

Ethinylestradiol is a synthetic oestrogen similar to estradiol, a natural female sex hormone. It is widely used in oral contraceptives in combination with a synthetic progestogen. These can also be used to treat an irregular menstrual cycle and conditions in women due to high levels of androgen (male sex hormones), such as polycystic ovary syndrome and hirsutism; they may also be used as HRT for the short-term relief of menopausal

symptoms. Ethinylestradiol may also be used to treat hypogonadism (late or absent sexual development) in women and, more rarely, osteoporosis, prostate cancer and, in combination with cyproterone, acne in women.

Women taking an oral contraceptive containing ethinylestradiol have an increased risk of venous thrombosis. This risk is greater in overweight women and smokers.

QUICK REFERENCE

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

Overdose danger rating Low

Dependence rating Low

Prescription needed Yes

Available as generic Yes

INFORMATION FOR USERS

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

How taken/used



Tablets.

Frequency and timing of doses

Once daily. Often at certain times of the menstrual cycle.

Adult dosage range

Menopausal symptoms 10–20mcg daily.

Hormone deficiency 10–50mcg daily.

Combined contraceptive pills 20–40mcg daily, depending on preparation.

Acne 35mcg daily.

Prostate cancer 0.15–1.5mg daily.

Onset of effect

10–20 days. Contraceptive protection is effective after 7 days in most cases.

Duration of action

1–2 days.

Diet advice

None.

Storage

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

Missed dose

Take as soon as you remember. If your next dose is due within 4 hours, take a single dose now and skip the next. If you are taking the drug for contraceptive purposes, see What to do if you miss a pill (p.123).

Stopping the drug

Do not stop the drug without consulting your doctor. Contraceptive protection is lost unless an alternative is used.

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 heart failure or high blood pressure.
- You have had venous thrombosis or a stroke.
- You have a long-term liver or kidney problems.
- You have had breast or endometrial cancer.
- You have diabetes, porphyria, or sickle cell anaemia.
- You are a smoker.
- You suffer from migraine or epilepsy.
- You are taking other medicines.



Pregnancy

Not prescribed. High doses may adversely affect the baby. Discuss with your doctor.



Breast-feeding

The drug passes into the breast milk; it may also inhibit milk flow. Discuss with your doctor.



Infants and children

Not usually prescribed.



Over 60

No special problems.



Driving and hazardous work

No known problems.



Alcohol

No known problems.

Surgery and general anaesthetics

Ethinylestradiol may need to be stopped several weeks before you have major surgery. Discuss this with your doctor.

POSSIBLE ADVERSE EFFECTS

The common adverse effects generally diminish with time. Sudden, sharp pain in the

chest, groin, or legs may indicate an abnormal blood clot and requires urgent attention.

Symptom/effect	Frequency		Discuss with doctor		Stop taking drug now	Call doctor now
	Common	Rare	Only if severe	In all cases		
Nausea/vomiting	●		●			
Breast swelling/tenderness	●		●			
Weight gain/fluid retention	●		●			
Bleeding between periods	●		●			
Headache		●	●			
Depression		●		●		
Pain in chest/groin/legs		●		●	●	●
Sudden breathlessness		●		●	●	●
Itching/jaundice		●		●	●	●

INTERACTIONS

Tobacco smoking This increases the risk of serious adverse effects on the heart and circulation with ethinylestradiol.

Rifampicin and anticonvulsants These drugs significantly reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptives containing ethinylestradiol.

Antihypertensive drugs, anticoagulants, and diuretics Ethinylestradiol may reduce the effectiveness of these drugs.

Antibiotics and St John's wort may reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptives containing ethinylestradiol.

PROLONGED USE

As part of HRT, ethinylestradiol is usually only advised for short-term use around the menopause and is not normally recommended for long-term use or for treatment of osteoporosis. Long-term use increases the risk of breast cancer, venous thrombosis, heart attack, and stroke.

Monitoring Physical examinations and blood pressure checks may be performed.