



Vaginal Progesterone

Reducing your chance of preterm birth

What is this leaflet about?

- We can never know exactly when your baby is going to arrive.
- Babies born before 37 weeks (preterm) can need more care at first. This is more likely if they are born before 34 weeks (6 weeks early). They may need go to the special care baby unit. We also call this the neonatal unit.
- For some people, using vaginal progesterone can reduce the risk of having their baby early. This leaflet explains more about it.

What is progesterone?

- Our bodies make chemicals called hormones. They carry messages that control how our bodies work. Progesterone is one of these.
- Your body normally makes progesterone when you have a period (menstrual cycle).
- It also makes it during pregnancy. Progesterone supports your womb (uterus) as it grows. It may also prevent contractions.

What is vaginal progesterone?

- Vaginal progesterone is a small tablet (pessary) that goes into your vagina. It is smaller than a tampon and dissolves quickly.
- It increases the amount of progesterone in your womb.

How does it lower my risk of an early birth?

We don't know exactly how progesterone prevents early birth.

But we know that it:

- can have an anti inflammatory effect
- can delay the changes in your cervix that lead to labour

Who is vaginal progesterone helpful for?

We may suggest it if an ultrasound between 16 and 24 weeks shows that the neck of your womb (cervix) is shorter than it should be.

We may also suggest it if:

- you have had a miscarriage or preterm birth between 16 and 34 weeks in the past

Sometimes we give vaginal progesterone to people who also have a cervical stitch. Some studies suggest that this lowers the risk of preterm birth more than the stitch alone.

Only take progesterone pessaries if they have been prescribed for you.



How do I use vaginal progesterone?

Wash your hands before and after inserting the progesterone pessary.

It is easier to insert the pessary if you are lying down or squatting. Place the pessary between the lips of the vagina and push the pessary upwards and backwards using your finger.

Progesterone pessaries may also be inserted into the rectum (back passage) as an alternative. Wash your hands before and after. Gently push the pessary into the rectum for about one inch. The muscles help to ensure the pessary is in far enough. Squeezing your buttocks together for a few seconds will ensure that the pessary does not come out.

When do I use it?

Put 1 pessary in every evening before bed. This means it is more likely to stay in place and be absorbed effectively.

When do I start use it?

Most people start between 16 to 20 weeks of pregnancy.

We might tell some people to start at 12 weeks.

How long will I use it for?

We recommend using it until 36 weeks and 6 days of pregnancy. The following day you are 37 weeks, which is 'term'.

How do I use vaginal progesterone?

Is it safe to take progesterone in pregnancy?

Yes. There is no evidence that progesterone will harm you or your baby.

Are there any side effects?

There are minimal side effects. Your vaginal discharge may change. There may be more of it, or it may be more watery.

Other side effects may include:

- headaches
- breast tenderness
- feeling or being sick
- a cough
- soreness in your vagina

If you are worried about anything after you start taking the pessary, contact your maternity assessment unit.

Do I have to take vaginal progesterone?

No. It is your choice whether you take it or not.

What could I do instead?

Watch and wait

You can choose to wait and see what happens.

If this is what you want, we will monitor you with ultrasound scans.

This is so we can keep measuring your cervix and check if it is getting shorter.

Cervical stitch (cerclage)

Putting a stitch around the neck of the womb sometimes helps.

This operation has its own risks and benefits. If we think it may be useful for you, we will talk to you about this.

Please ask your doctor or midwife if you want to know more.

You may also find this leaflet about cervical stitch useful:

www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-all-patient-information-leaflets/cervical-stitch-patient-information-leaflet/

Who can I speak to if I want to know more?

If you have any questions or worries, contact your maternity assessment unit.

To find their details in Badger Notes:

1. Go to Profile.
2. Choose Hospital Contacts.
3. You will find a list of contact numbers. Choose the maternity assessment unit or advice line.