

Modern Milestones and Key Developments

1960 – A new era begins

On 11 May 1960, American Searle Pharmaceutical Corporation introduced the first oral contraceptive pill *Enovid* (norethynodrel and an estrodial called mestranol) to the US market.

Nine months later on 1 February 1961, Australia was the first country in Asia Pacific to launch the oral contraceptive pill Anovlar[®]. This Pill was launched by Schering Australia now part of Bayer Schering Pharma.

At the time the Pill was first made available in Australia, it was only accessible by married women.

1960s – Evolution of the modern Pill: benefits beyond contraception

Throughout the 1960s, research into the development of other hormones was progressing in leaps and bounds. Some of these hormones had positive effects beyond simply preventing pregnancy, such as the discovery of Cyproterone Acetate which provides antiandrogenic activity and used in oral contraceptives for the management of acne and excessive hair growth.

In the coming years oral contraceptives were developed which aimed to decrease the level of hormones (reducing side effects) without compromising the contraceptive reliability.

In 1964, Anovlar[®] was offered in a calendar pack for the first time – similar to modern oral contraceptives. On the packet, each tablet was labelled with a day of the week and the order in which the tablets should be taken was marked by arrows. Anovlar[®] followed a regimen still in use today: 21 days of hormones followed by a 7 day break to allow for menstruation. This 21/7 regimen was introduced to help make it easier for women to keep track of their Pill and assist with compliance.

By 1967, over 12.5 million women worldwide were on the Pill.

1970s and beyond – Enhanced effects and lower dosage

The introduction of the Pill has possibly had a greater influence on our culture than any other pharmaceutical product in history, with profound medicinal, social and political implications. This one little Pill changed the course of history, giving women freedom like they had never before experienced and allowing them for the first time to control their own fertility.

Over the last 50 years, the Pill has developed to meet the changing needs of women. Today, the Pill provides contraceptive efficacy with a lower hormone dose and benefits beyond contraception such as improved skin condition and reduced severe premenstrual symptoms. The availability of the Pill also paved the way for the introduction of other longer-acting forms of hormonal contraception.

The 2001 Sex in Australia survey showed that the Pill is the most popular form of contraception among Australian women.

Contraceptive fast facts

- About **100 million women worldwide** use combination hormonal contraception.
- COCs used properly has **99% success rate** and is one of the most effective reversible forms of birth control available to women today.
- Use of the Pill **has the widest geographic distribution** of any contraceptive method.