

Different ways to take the combined pill

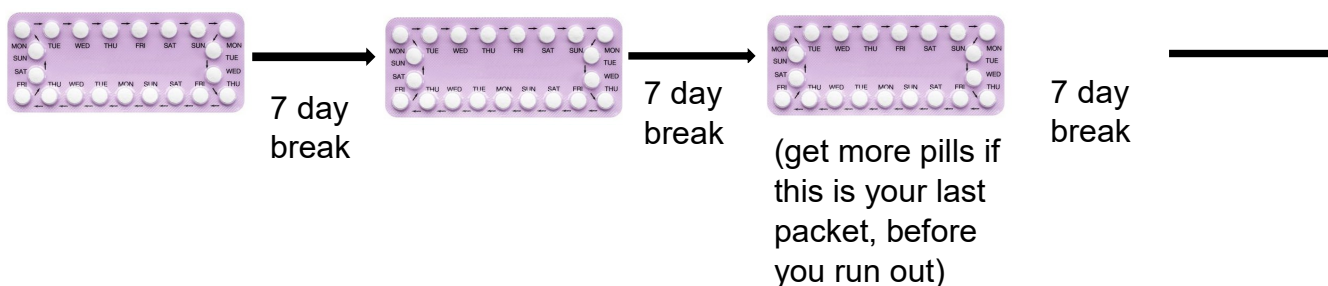
This leaflet explains the different ways to take the combined contraceptive pill.

Traditional method

The pill was designed so that women would still have a period every 4 weeks, to mimic a natural cycle. This is the way that the combined pill was originally licenced to be used. If you would like a regular monthly bleed, take the pill this way.

- Take 21 pills (starting on the first day of your natural period, or as instructed by the clinician). This is the amount of pills in 1 packet.
- When you have finished the packet, have a 7-day pill/hormone free interval or a 'break'. During these 7 days you will have a bleed. It is likely to be lighter and shorter than your natural period.
- On the 8th day start the next packet (even if you are bleeding).

This will mean you will always start your new packet of pills on the same day of the week.

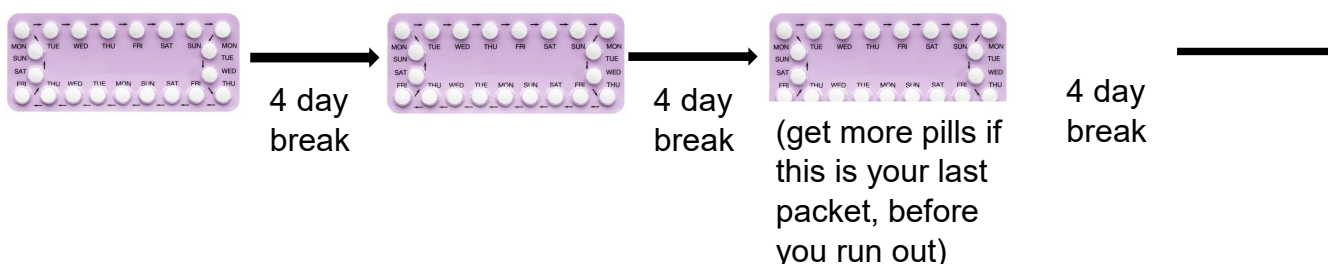


Shortened hormone / Pill-free interval

- Take 21 pills (starting on the first day of your natural period, or as instructed by the clinician). This is the amount of pills in 1 packet.
- When you have finished the packet, have a 4-day pill/hormone free interval or a 'break'. During these 4 days you will have a bleed. It is likely to be lighter and shorter than your natural period.
- On the 5th day start the next packet (even if you are bleeding).

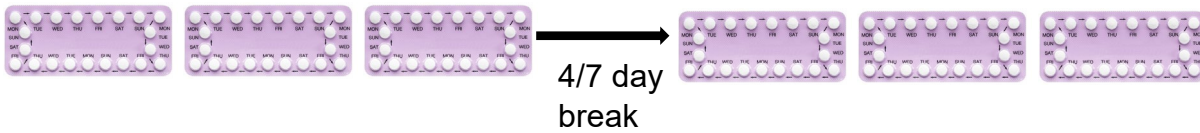
This will mean you will always start your new packet of pills on a different day of the week.

The chances of pill failure are minimised by reducing the pill free interval.



Tricycling

This means taking 3 packets of the pill without a break, then having a 4/7 day and then taking a further 3 packets without a break, etc. This can be helpful if you usually have troublesome symptoms when you are on your period.



Tailored / Continuous pill taking

If you wish to have few bleeds as possible then you can take the pill packets back to back continuously. But you may still have a bleed while taking the pills.

If you bleed for 4 consecutive days after at least 21 days of pill, take a 4-day break.

During these 4 days you will continue to bleed.

Then restart continuous use of pills.

If you start bleeding again for 4 consecutive days, stop the pill again for 4 days.

Make sure you take the pill for at least 21 days between these 4 day breaks.

If you are getting bleeding or spotting more than once every 2 weeks, you should speak to a clinician who prescribed the pills. You may need a check-up for infections, or might need to try a different pill.



If you bleed for 4 days in a row miss the next 4 pills then restart

The patch and vaginal ring can be used in the same ways as described above.

How safe is tricycling and tailored / continuous pill taking?

Tricycling and tailored/continuous pill taking are examples of 'off licence' prescribing, as the pills are being used in a different way from how they are licensed to be used.

Using the pill in any of these ways is **NOT** harmful. Using tricycling or continuous pill regime the frequency of withdrawal bleeds and associated symptoms (e.g. headache, mood change) is reduced; this could be useful for women who have heavy or painful bleeding or problematic symptoms associated with the hormone-free interval /'break'.

There is no build-up of menstrual blood inside a woman who uses pill for an extended time without a break; extended pill use keeps the lining of the womb thin. Using tricycling or continuous regimens of the pill does not affect the return of a woman's fertility when she stops the pill.

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Next review due: December 2025