

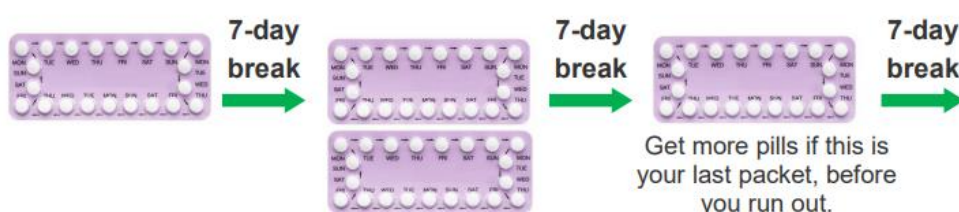
Different ways of taking the combined pill

This leaflet explains the different ways of taking the combined pill as an effective contraceptive method.

Traditional method

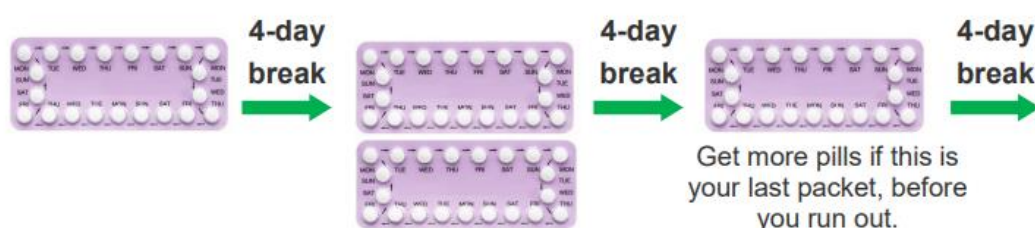
The pill was designed so that women would still have a period every 4 weeks, to mimic a natural cycle. This is the way that the combined pill was originally licensed to be used. If you would like a regular monthly bleed, take the pill this way:

- Take all 21 pills (one daily, starting on day 1 of your natural period, or as instructed by the clinician). Twenty-one is the amount of pills in one packet.
- When you finish the packet, take a 7-day pill-free 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 still bleeding). This will mean you will always start your new packet of pills on the same day of the week.



Shortened pill-free break method

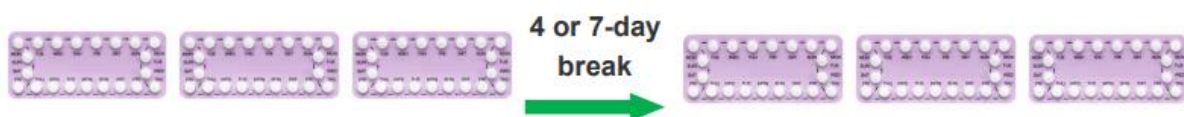
- Take all 21 pills (one daily, starting on day 1 of your natural period, or as instructed by the clinician). Twenty-one is the amount of pills in one packet.
- When you have finished the packet, have a 4-day pill-free break. During these 4 days you will have a bleed. It is likely to be lighter and shorter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

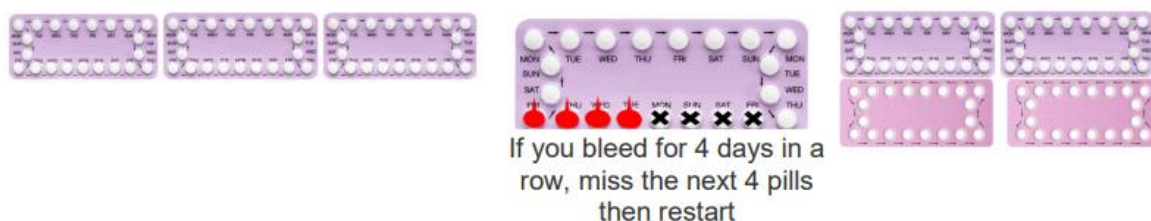
This means taking 3 packets of the pill without a break, then having a 4 or 7-day pill-free break, and then taking a further 3 packets without a break, etc. This can be helpful if you usually have troublesome symptoms when you are on your period.

- Take 63 pills (one daily, starting on day 1 of your natural period, or as instructed by the clinician). Twenty-one is the amount of pills in one packet so 63 is three packets.
- When you have finished the third packet, have either a 4-day or a 7-day pill-free break. During these 4 or 7 days you will have a bleed. It is likely to be lighter and shorter than your natural period.
- On the 5th or 8th day start a new packet (even if you are still bleeding) and take three packets (one daily). And so on, etc.



Tailored or continuous pill method

- 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 days in a row after at least 21 days of pills, take a 4-day break.
- During these 4 days you will continue to bleed.
- Then restart continuous use of pills, missing out the pills on the days of your break.
- If you start bleeding again for 4 days in a row, stop the pill again for 4 days.
- Make sure you take the pill for at least 21 days between these 4-day pill-free 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.



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

How safe is the tricycling or tailored/continuous pill methods?

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 methods reduces the frequency of withdrawal (break) bleeds and associated symptoms (e.g. headache, mood change). This could be useful for women who have heavy or painful bleeding or problematic symptoms associated with the pill-free 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 methods of the pill does not affect the return of a woman's fertility when she stops the pill.