Different ways to take the combined pill

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

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

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

Tricycling
This means taking 3 packets of the pill without a break, then having a 7 day break, and then taking a further 3 packets of the pill without a break, etc. Instead of having 13 bleeds each year, you will only have 5. This can be helpful if you usually have troublesome symptoms when you have a ‘period’.

![Tricycling diagram](https://example.com/tricycling-diagram.png)
Tailored/Continuous pill taking

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

If you bleed for 2 days in a row whilst taking your pills continuously then **stop taking your pills for 4 days**. Pop these 4 pills out of the packet and throw them away, so you stay on the correct day of the week. During these 4 days you will continue to bleed. On the fifth day start taking your pills again. Continue taking the packets back to back. If you start bleeding again for 2 days in a row, stop the pill again for 4 days. **Make sure you take the pill for at least 14 days between these 4 day breaks.** You will need to remember to get more pills before your last packet runs out.

If you bleed for 2 days in a row miss the next 4 pills then restart

Some women always start bleeding after a certain length of time (for example, during the 4th strip of pills). If this happens regularly, you can take a planned 4 day break before the time you are likely to start bleeding. If you have a holiday or party coming up and you are worried you might start bleeding during this time, you can deliberately take a 4 day break the week before to get the bleed over with.

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

**How safe is tricycling and tailored/continuous pill taking?**

Tailored/continuous pill taking and tricycling are examples of `off licence` prescribing, as the pills are being used in a different way from how they were licensed to be used. There is no evidence that taking the pill in any of these ways is harmful.

**How to contact us**

**Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service**
Tel: 01865 231 231
Website: www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

Authors: Dr A Forsyth, Dr E Holloway, Dr S Moser, Dr J Shefras
August 2015
Review: August 2018
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxford OX3 9DU
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

OMI 11994P