

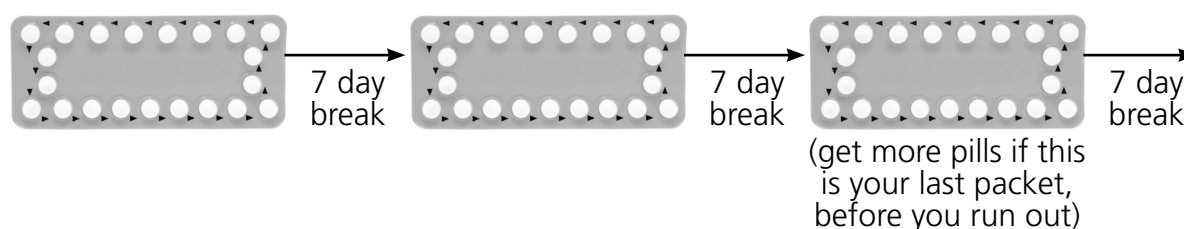
Different ways to take the combined contraceptive pill

TRADITIONAL METHOD

The combined contraceptive 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 licensed to be used. If you would like to have a regular monthly bleed, take the pill in this way.

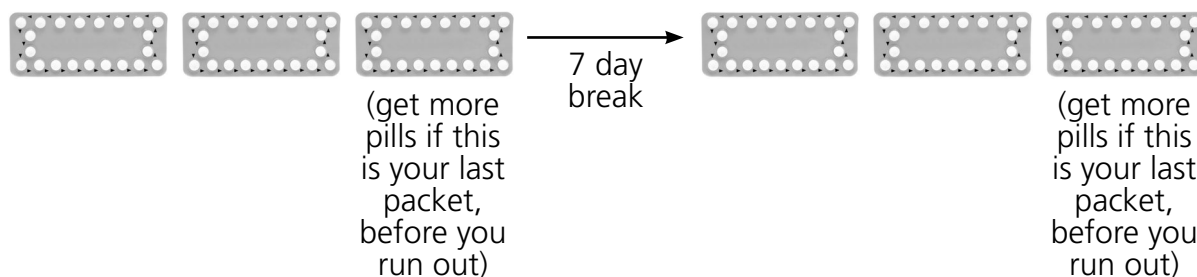
- Take 21 pills (starting on the first or second day of your period, or as instructed by your doctor/nurse). This is the amount of pills in 1 packet.
- When you have finished the packet, have a 7 day pill free interval or 'break'. During these 7 days you will usually have a bleed. It is likely to be 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'.



TAILORED/CONTINUOUS PILL TAKING

If you want 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. You will need to remember to get more pills before your last packet runs out.

If you bleed for 4 days in a row whilst taking your pills continuously, then **stop taking your pills for the next 4 days**. Pop these 4 pills out of the packet and dispose of them safely, 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 and this lasts for 4 days in a row, stop the pill again for 4 days. **Make sure you don't take a break more than once every 4 weeks, as this could affect your contraception.**

If you are getting bleeding or spotting more than once every 4 weeks, you should speak to the doctor or nurse who prescribed your 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

Some women always start bleeding after a certain length of time (for example, during the 4th packet 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.

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 originally licensed to be used. These ways of taking combined contraceptive pills are now recommended by the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (the UK organisation which issues guidance on contraceptive care), as they can help with period related symptoms. They are safe, and may be more effective at preventing pregnancy. They do not affect a woman's return to fertility on stopping the pill.

HOW TO CONTACT US

Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service

Tel: **01865 231 231**

Website: www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

