

Continuous Pill Taking

What is continuous pill taking?

- This is a way of taking the pill leaving out the regular pill free break – i.e. **not** in the usual 21 tablets then stopping for 7 days way (21/7 for short).
- This is an “off licence” prescription. Yet it is supported by medical authorities in the UK and by WHO: there’s lots of evidence for it making your pill much safer, contraceptively. We have known for some time that the routine of *not taking tablets for 7 days weakens the pill’s main effect* of stopping your ovaries from releasing an egg: so it makes egg-release more likely when pills are missed. Since it’s quite common to forget 1 or 2 pills, ordinary women find the method lets them down about 10 times more often than if “over 99% effective” was true, in the real world.
- It also means you don’t have to have regular monthly bleeds, which have no known benefits.
- A non-phasic 20 mcg oestrogen pill is used - your healthcare provider will be able to tell you this.

What are the benefits for me?

- As just said, it makes the pill more effective as a contraceptive.
- It reduces problems such as period pain, PMT, migraine and other headaches, and more.
- It’s convenient for when you want to avoid bleeding e.g. for holidays and special occasions.

How do I take the pill continuously?

- Start your pill on the correct day of the week (as shown on the strip).
- Take one pill at about the same time each day, at a time that is easy for you to remember.
- Take all the pills in that strip, and then start the next strip without a break.
- Keep taking the strips without a break

How long can I take the pill continuously?

Indefinitely – until either you choose another method or your surgery/clinic advises this.

Isn’t it better for me to have “periods” every month?

- Modern contraception is very safe and women do not need to bleed every month to know that they are not pregnant.
- The “period” on the pill is completely artificial and is just your womb’s response to stopping the pill (and therefore the hormones) for a few days. It is called a “hormone withdrawal bleed”.
- Continuous pill-taking just stops you having that completely unnecessary regular bleed.

What happens if I get bleeding while taking the pill continuously?

- Irregular bleeding and/or 'spotting' during the first months of continuous pill-taking can occur, but most women find this becomes acceptable as it lessens over time.
- If the bleeding becomes troublesome to you, e.g. by continuing for more than a few days, stop the pill for 4 days. No need to contact the surgery or clinic first. Also:
 - o Unless you also missed other tablets for any reason in the previous week, no need to take extra precautions.
 - o Then restart your pill taking the correct pill for that day, leaving out the 4 unused pills.
 - o Continue as before.

Having this 4-day break usually works to stop or improve the bleeding, but if it carries on and does not resolve, you should seek advice from your surgery/clinic in case you need a check up to exclude other causes of bleeding e.g. Chlamydia.

***What is an "off licence" prescription?**

- All medicines have a product licence. The licence tells us under which conditions the medicine can be prescribed for patients.
- If expert medical opinion is that a medicines can be used also in different ways or under different conditions, this is called prescribing "off-licence".
- Prescribing off-licence is as safe as taking the pill in the standard way because we still follow medical guidelines.