



## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

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# Different ways to take the combined oral contraception pill

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### Introduction

The combined pill was originally designed to mimic the natural menstrual cycle so has a period-like bleed every four weeks. However, we now know there a lot of different and safe ways to take your combined pill, which give you more control over your bleeds; this guide will explain these.

**The different ways of taking your pill will change the number of bleeds you have in a year.**

If you are not sure whether your pill can be used in different ways, please check with your contraception provider before changing how you take your pill.

**For all combined pills** (except Qlaira® or pill packs with dummy or placebo pills, e.g. Zoely® / Eloine®) if you start them on day one to five natural of your period, they are effective immediately. If you start them on any other day, it will take seven days before they are effective at preventing pregnancy.

### Traditional method

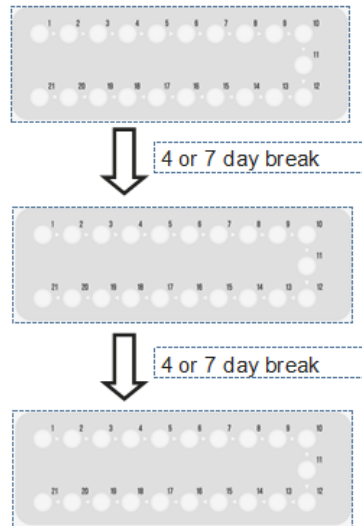
The combined pill was originally designed to mimic the natural menstrual cycle so has a period-like bleed every four weeks. If you prefer to have a regular bleed, take the pill this way. This is the only licenced way to take the pill.

Take your pills for 21 days then have a seven day break. On day eight, start taking the next packet of pills, even if you are still bleeding. Using this method, you will always start and stop your pills on the same day of the week.

### Shortened pill break

If you would rather have a shorter bleed, you can choose to take a four day break instead. If you are to do this, on day five after stopping, start taking the next packet even if you are still bleeding.

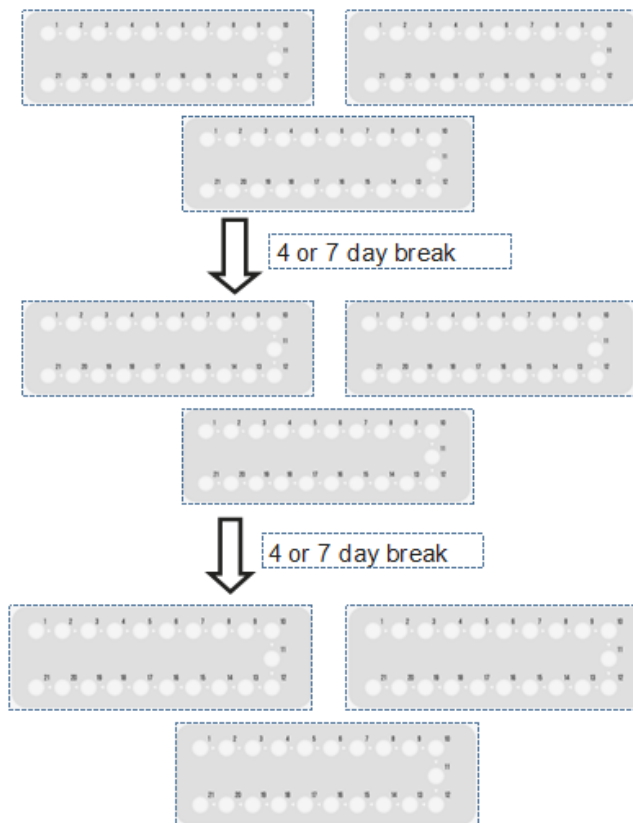
A shortened pill break has benefits such as a lighter bleed or may be useful if you suffer from headaches or mood swings on the pill-free days, but would still prefer to have a regular bleed instead of no bleed.



## Tricycling

If you have heavy or painful periods you may want to **tricycle** your pill. This is where you take your pill for three packs before stopping and having a four or seven-day bleed. On day five, you restart the pill again for another three packs.

This method means you will only have five periods a year, instead of thirteen.



## Bleed-led

If you do not want to have a regular bleed, you can take the pill packs back-to-back. Make sure you have taken at least 21 pills in a row before any breaks.

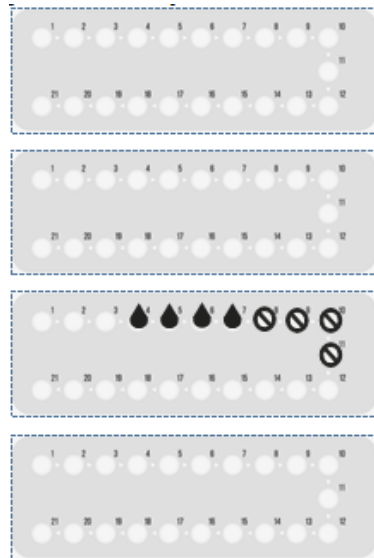
If you find you are having breakthrough bleeding (bleeding while still taking the pills) you can take a break for four days before restarting the pills again.

If you bleed for three to four days in a row while taking the pills continuously, then you should stop for four days before restarting the pills.

Some people always have bleeding start after a certain length of time, for example after the fourth packet of pills.

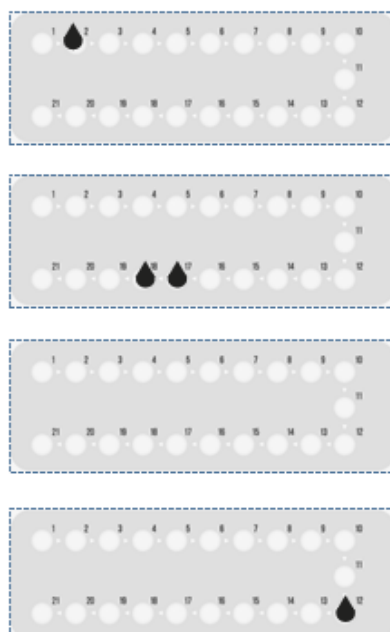
If you have an event coming up that you do not want to bleed for, take a four day break the week before the event.

If you have spotting more than once every four weeks or after sex, then you should make an appointment to see a nurse or doctor, as there may be another cause, or it may be that the pill you are on is not the right choice for you.



### Continuous

You can take the pill packets back-to-back. Even if you have bleeding, it is safe to continue taking the pill. Around seven in ten pill users will be bleed free after twelve months. If you have spotting more than once every four weeks or after sex, then you should make an appointment to see a nurse or doctor, as there may be another cause, or it may be that the pill you are on is not the right choice for you.



## Is it safe?

Tailored combined pill use are examples of 'off label' use, where medications are prescribed in a different way to how they were first researched to be used. These different ways of taking the combined pill are safe and are recommended by the UK national contraception body - The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health (FSRH).

There is no evidence that tailored use is any less safe, or less effective and there is no health reason to have a regular period/bleed while on hormonal contraception.

Using your combined pill in a way which suits you may have non-contraceptive benefits such as treating heavy or painful periods, and gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis or premenstrual syndrome.

There is a chance that by taking the combined pill daily it may be more effective at preventing pregnancy as you are less likely to forget a pill or be late restarting after the pill free week.

The only combined pills this does not apply to are those which have dummy (placebo) pills in the pack such as Eloine® and Zoely® or different hormone doses in the pack (such as Qlaira®).

Progesterone only pills (the POP or mini-pill) cannot be used in these ways.

**However you take your pill, remember to get more when you start your last packet.**

## Further sources of information

### Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service:

- **Nottingham University Hospitals:** 0800 183 02 04  
Email: [nuhnt.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:nuhnt.PALS@nhs.net)
- **King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222  
**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692  
Email: [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can contact the Patient Experience Teams using the details above.

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