

Continuous Pill Taking



What does 'continuous pill taking' mean?

This is a way of taking the pill without taking a regular 'pill free break' (of 7 days off after every 21 days of pill), during which you would usually have a bleed.

This is an 'off licence' prescription, which means that the instructions are different from those recommended by the manufacturer. There is strong evidence that continuous pill taking is safe and it is supported by medical authorities in the UK

What are the benefits?

Continuous pill taking makes your pill a much more effective contraceptive. You don't need to have regular monthly bleeds, which have no known medical benefits, and by taking the pill continuously you stop having a regular monthly bleed. There is a reduction in other potential problems such as period pain, premenstrual syndrome, migraine and headaches. It's convenient for when you want to avoid bleeding e.g. on holidays and special occasions.

How do I take the pill continuously?

- 1) Start your pill on the correct day of the week (shown on the strip)
- 2) Take one pill at the same time every day
- 3) Continue until you have finished all the pills in the strip
- 4) Start the next strip without a break
- 4) Continue taking strips without a break in between

How long can I take the pill continuously for?

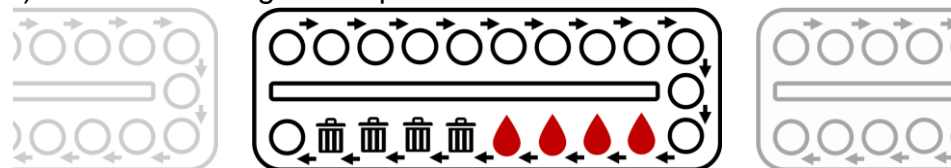
As long as you want – until you choose another method of contraception, you want to stop contraception to conceive, or your doctor advises you to change method.

What happens if I get bleeding with continuous pill taking?

Irregular bleeding or 'spotting' can occur during the first months of contraception, including continuous pill taking, but most women find this lessens over time.

If you bleed for 4 days in a row whilst taking your pills continuously:

- 1) Stop taking your pills for 4 days
- 2) Pop these 4 pills out of the strip and discard (*return to your community pharmacy for appropriate disposal*)
- 3) During these 4 days you will continue to bleed
- 4) On the fifth day, start taking your pills again
- 5) Continue taking the strips back to back



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 14 days between these 4 day breaks.

Some people always start bleeding after a certain length of time. If this happens regularly, you can take a planned 4 day break before the time you are likely to start bleeding.

If you are getting bleeding or spotting more than once every month, speak to your doctor. You might need to have a check-up for infections or try a different pill.

Missed or late pills during continuous use

As long as you have taken 7 or more pills in a row before you miss a pill, you don't need emergency contraception. You will still be protected against pregnancy, even if you had sex since you took your last pill.

If you have missed less than 7 pills in a row:

- 1) Restart your strip of pills straight away
- 2) Continue the next strip without any more breaks in pill taking

If you have taken less than 7 pills in a row before missing your pills, or if you have missed more than 7 pills in a row:

- 1) You might need emergency contraception
- 2) Please contact your GP or attend a sexual health clinic
- 3) Restart the pill and use condoms or abstain from sex for 7 days
- 4) You should do a pregnancy test after 3 weeks

What if I have vomiting (being sick) or severe diarrhoea?

These might stop you from absorbing pills properly but as long as you have been taking the pill continuously for 7 days in a row:

- 1) You don't need to take extra precautions
- 2) Continue taking a pill every day
- 3) Speak to your doctor if the diarrhoea or vomiting last for 7 days

If I take other medicines will they affect my pill?

If you are prescribed any medication, always inform the prescriber that you are 'taking the combined pill', because some medicines can make it less effective. St John's Wort, which is a herbal remedy, may also reduce the effectiveness of the pill. Normal painkillers and antibiotics do not affect how the pill works.

How often should I come back for follow up?

Once you are settled on the pill, you usually only need an appointment once a year to see if there have been any changes to your health, your family's health, your other medication, or allergies. You will also have your blood pressure, height and weight measured.

If at any other time you have questions, have a problem or want to change your method of contraception, speak to your doctor or attend a sexual health clinic.

What is an 'off licence' prescription?

All medicines have a product licence which tells us conditions under which the medicine can be prescribed for patients. If expert medical opinion is that a medicine can also be used in other ways, this is called prescribing 'off licence' and is allowed by medical authorities.

Prescribing the combined hormonal contraceptive pill 'off licence' for continuous pill taking is approved by The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health (FSRH).