

# West of Scotland Sexual Health Managed Clinical Network

**NHS**  
Ayrshire  
& Arran

**NHS**  
Dumfries  
& Galloway

**NHS**  
Forth Valley

**NHS**  
Greater Glasgow  
and Clyde

**NHS**  
Lanarkshire

## Different ways to take the Combined Contraceptive Pill



**Shortened Break**

**Tricycling**

**Flexible Method**

**Continuous Method**

**Traditional Method**

## Shortened Break

New guidance advises women to shorten their 'break' to 4 days. This means that if any pills are missed when restarting, there is less chance of the pill not working. Take one pill a day for 21 days, then no pills for the next 4 days.

Take one pill a day for 21 days.

Start on the 1st or 2nd day of your period or as instructed by your doctor/nurse.

Have a 4 day pill free interval or 'break' when you have finished the packet.

During these 4 days you will usually have a bleed. It may be shorter and lighter than your natural period.

On the 5th day, start the next packet of pills, even if you are still bleeding.

## Tricycling

This means taking 3 packets of the pill, then having a 4 day break. After the 4 day break, restart the pill and repeat the cycle. During your 4 day break you will likely have a bleed. Tricycling packets reduces how many bleeds you have in a year. This can be helpful if you have troublesome symptoms when you have a 'period'.

Take one pill a day for 9 weeks.

Start on the 1st or 2nd day of your period or as instructed by your doctor/nurse.

Have a 4 day pill free interval or 'break' when you have finished 3 packets.

During these 4 days you will usually have a bleed. It may be shorter and lighter than your natural period.

On the 5th day, start the next packet of pills, even if you are still bleeding

## Flexible Method

If you want to have less frequent bleeds, then you can take the pill packets continuously. You may still have a bleed while taking the pills.

If you bleed for 3-4 days in a row whilst taking your pills continuously and you have taken at least 21 pills, have a 4 day break. Then restart the packet.

Take one pill a day for at least 21 days or 1 packet.

Start on the 1st or 2nd day of your period or as instructed by your doctor/nurse.

When you bleed for 3-4 days, have a 4 day pill free interval or 'break'.

During these 4 days you will usually have a bleed. It may be shorter and lighter than your natural period.

On the 5th day, start the next packet of pills.

## Continuous Method

If you wish to have as few bleeds as possible, then you can take the pill packets continuously. With this method, you don't have a break and continue taking a pill every day. You may still have a bleed while taking the pills.

If you are bleeding or spotting more than once every 2 weeks, you should speak to your doctor/nurse. You may need a check up for infections. You may need to take the pill differently or try another type of pill.

Take one pill a day

Start taking pills on the 1st or 2nd day of your period or as instructed by your doctor/nurse.

Continue taking the pills without having a break.

## Traditional Method

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

Take one pill a day for 21 days.

Start on the 1st or 2nd day of your period or as instructed by your doctor/nurse.



Have a 7 day pill free interval or 'break' when you have finished the packet.

During these 7 days you will usually have a bleed.  
It may be shorter and lighter than your natural period.



On the 8th day, start the next packet of pills (even if you are still bleeding).

You will always start a new packet of pills on the same day of the week.

## Contact Us

Appointment line 0345 702 3687  
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Facebook message: Sexual Health D&G  
[www.sexualhealthdg.co.uk](http://www.sexualhealthdg.co.uk)

## Further Information

- Family Planning Association: [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)
- Contraception Choices <https://www.contraceptionchoices.org/>

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