

Combined Hormonal Contraception - Pill

Method of Taking

If you start on the first day of your period you will be protected from pregnancy straight away.

If you start at any other time you will need to use condoms too for 7 days.

It is important to try and take your pill at the same time each day.

There are now several choices about how to use your pill:

- Standard use 21 days: Take your pill for 21 days, then have a 7-day break, restarting on the 8th day.
- Tailored use (Shortened hormone-free interval): Take your pill for 21 days, then have a 4-day break, restarting on the 5th day.
- Extended use (tricycling) 9 weeks: Take your pill for 3 months every day then take a 4- or 7-day break, restarting on the 5th or 8th day.
- Flexible extended use: Take your pill EVERY DAY for at least 21 days. If breakthrough bleeding occurs for at least 3 days, then take a 4-day break and restart on the 5th day.
- Continuous use: Take your pill every day without a break. Breakthrough bleeding may occur but usually settles.

Always start your next pill as instructed in your chosen method, whether you are bleeding or not.

If you choose a hormone free interval you are protected from pregnancy during that time if you have taken your pill correctly for the previous 7 days.

The use of tailored regimens is outside the manufacturers license but endorsed by the College of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (CoSRH)

Missed pill rule

If you are late taking your pill take it as soon as you remember and the next one at your normal time. It is OK to take 2 pills together or 2 in the same day.

If you are within 24 hours of your normal time you are still protected.

If you miss 2 or more pills you will need to use condoms too for 7 days. If these 7 days run into your 4- or 7-day break miss your break and run packets back-to-back. You may or may not experience bleeding.

Vomiting and diarrhoea

If you vomit or have diarrhoea within 2 hours of taking the combined pill, it may not have been fully absorbed into your bloodstream. Take another pill straight away and the next pill at your usual time.

If you continue to be sick, use additional contraception while you're ill and 7 days after recovering.

Very severe diarrhoea may also mean that the pill doesn't work properly. Keep taking your pill as normal. You should use additional contraception, such as condoms, while you have diarrhoea and for 7 days after recovering.

Use of other medicines

Some medicines can stop the pill from working.

These include:

- some medication that treats TB or fungal infections
- medication for HIV
- medication for epilepsy
- St John's Wort
- some diabetes and weight loss medicines, like tirzepatide medication (Mounjaro®)

If you're taking any of these medicines, you'll need additional contraception. You may wish to change your form of contraception that isn't affected by your medication.

Always tell your doctor you're using the pill if you're prescribed any medicine.

Side effects of the combined method

The combined method may cause temporary side effects. These are usually mild and settle within 3 months of starting.

Risks of using the combined method

There are some risks of using the combined method, but these are not common.

Seek URGENT medical attention if you experience any of the following rare symptoms which could indicate that you have a blood clot.

- Painful swelling on one or both legs
- Severe chest or stomach pain
- Breathlessness or coughing with blood
- A bad fainting episode or collapse
- Unusual headaches
- Difficulty with sight or speech
- More severe migraine attacks than are usual for you
- Numbness, weakness or pins and needles of a limb.

Combined hormonal contraception may slightly increase the risk of cervical cancer and breast cancer. This risk decreases when the pill is stopped. However, there is a protective effect for bowel, ovarian and endometrial cancer.

Please speak with a clinician if you have any questions.

For more information, please contact Sexual Health West Sussex on 01903 285199 or visit our website on www.sexualhealthwestsussex.nhs.uk