

Instructions for taking Combined Oral Contraceptive Pills

Start the pill on the first day of your next period. You will be protected from pregnancy immediately. If you start the pill more than 4 days after your period started you must use condoms or abstain from sex for 7 days before you are protected against pregnancy. We also advise that you consider performing a home pregnancy test 3 weeks later if there are concerns regarding risk of pregnancy.

There are different pill regimes as detailed below –

Traditional pill regime

21 days of pills (1 pack) followed by 7 days pill-free interval

Shortened Hormone-free interval

21 days of pills (1 pack) followed by 4 days pill-free interval

Tricycling regime

63 days of pills (3 packs) followed by 4 or 7 day pill-free interval

Flexible extended regime

The pill can be used continuously (with no breaks), but breakthrough bleeding may occur. This is likely to improve with time. If you have breakthrough bleeding for 4 consecutive days after at least 21 days of pill, you can take a 4 day break, then restart continuous use for at least 21 days (and if no bleeding, continue) or if bleeding for 4 consecutive days after at least 21 days of pill, take a 4 day break then restart continuous use and so on....

Do not stop the pill if bleeding starts when you have taken less than 21 days of pill.

During the Pill-free Interval

During this time you will have a 'period'. Bleeding may not start for a few days. Sometimes you will have spotting or bleeding between periods. This normally settles down after a few months. If this does not settle you should seek advice, but carry on taking the pill in the meantime. Occasionally you may miss a 'period'. If you have been taking your pill correctly don't worry, carry on taking the pill. However, if you miss another period seek advice. If you have been missing pills and your period does not come during the pill free interval you may be pregnant.

Missed one pill?

If you miss one pill anywhere in the pack don't worry, you are still protected against pregnancy, even if you have had unprotected sex. You do not need emergency contraception.

Missed two or more pills?

- Take the most recent missed pill
- Continue taking the remaining pills
- Use condoms or abstain from sex for 7 days

If you missed 2 or more pills in week 1 of the pack (Days 1-7) and have had any unprotected sex during that time or in the preceding pill free interval you should use emergency contraception. You can get this free from any pharmacy in Scotland or you can seek advice from your GP or local family planning centre.

If you have not had unprotected sex, you should use condoms or abstain from sex until pills have been taken for 7 consecutive days.

If you missed 2 or more pills in week 2 (days 8-14) continue taking the pill and use condoms or abstain from sex until pills have been taken for 7 consecutive days. You do not need emergency contraception.

If you missed 2 or more pills in week 3 (days 15-21) you should finish the pills in your pack and start the next pack the next day. Do not have a pill free interval. You do not need emergency contraception, but should use condoms or abstain from sex until pills have been taken for 7 consecutive days.

If you are sick

If you vomit within 2 hours of taking a pill, take another. If vomiting continues or you have severe diarrhoea for more than 72 hours your protection is reduced and you should follow the missed pill rules.

Other medicines

Certain medicines, including the herbal remedy St John's Wort, can reduce the effectiveness of the pill. Check with your doctor whether you need any extra contraception.