

Combined Hormonal Contraception (CHC – Patch, combined pill, ring)

Common side effects:

- Breast discomfort
- Change in vaginal discharge
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Mood change with hormone free interval (HFI)

Benefits:

- Can reduce acne
- Reduces menstrual flow and associated pain
- Can reduce the symptoms of endometriosis and PMS
- Significantly reduces risk of endometrial and ovarian cancer (this benefit is longlasting)

Risks:

- If used for over 5 years, small increased risk in cervical cancer, which reduces with time after stopping
- Small increased risk of breast cancer which reduces with time after stopping
- Venous thromboembolism (clots in legs and lungs)
 - Approximately double that of people not taking the pill
 - However risk is still very low
 - Watch for – hot, red, swollen painful leg on one side only
 - If suspected – See GP or A&E same day and stop CHC
 - This risk increases if you have long periods of immobility or travel to high altitude – speak to nurse/GP if unsure
- Associated with a small increase risk of ischaemic stroke and heart attack (these events are extremely uncommon in CHC taking women)

How to take your pill – tailored regimes

Flexi Continuous

Continuous use of active pill, patch or ring, until breakthrough bleeding occurs, with a 4 day break.

If you have troublesome irregular bleeding or spotting, you can stop the pill for 4 days (which will prompt a withdrawal bleed). Restart your pill after 4 days, whether you are still bleeding or not, and continue until you bleed again.

This is a safe and effective, guideline based unlicensed way of taking a licensed medication. It is supported by the medical authorities in the UK (FRSH) and the WHO. This way of taking the pill can reduce the risk of ovulation (and therefore pregnancy) which is higher when you have a prolonged hormone free interval (HFI), therefore making the pill a safer method of contraception. The drug companies have not yet updated the pack size or their advice leaflets. Please ignore previous advice and follow the pill rules above.

It also has other benefits

- There is no withdrawal bleed (this is an artificial bleed caused by withdrawing the hormones in the HFI. It has no health benefit)
- Reduction in period pain, menstrual headaches, PMT

Extended use (tricycling)

9 weeks (63 pills, 3 rings or 9 patches used consecutively, followed by a 4 day break and restart.

Shortened break (HFI)

If you prefer to continue with a monthly bleed, take 21 pills and have a 4 day break, and repeat.

Missed Pills

You can have a maximum of 7 days without taking your pills and still have protection against pregnancy. (You may bleed) Restart pills immediately. Extra precautions only required if you had a break within the last 7 days. No need for emergency contraception. Continue your pills and don't take a break for the next 7 days.

MORE THAN 7 pills - you may need emergency contraception. Contact surgery or pharmacy.

Vomiting/severe diarrhoea – only need extra precautions if lasting more than 7 days.