Licensed, tri-cycling or extended use of the combined oral contraceptive pill/patch/ring
Information for patients
What is licensed pill/patch/ring taking?

**Standard combined pill:**
- Take a pill every day without any breaks until the pack is finished (21 days)
- Then stop taking pills for seven days (during this 7 day break you are likely to start bleeding)
- Start your next pack on the eighth day whether or not you are still bleeding
- Continue this pattern.

**Everyday pills:**
- Take a pill every day until the pack is finished (28 days)
- During the days that you take the placebo pills you are likely to get some bleeding
- When you finish a pack you should start another pack the next day whether or not you are still bleeding.

**Evra patch:**
- Apply a new patch once a week, every week for three weeks (21 days)
- Then stop using the patch for seven days (patch-free week)
- During this 7 day break you are likely to start bleeding
- Restart the patch on the 8th day
- Continue with this pattern.

**Nuvaring:**
- Leave the vaginal ring in the vagina for three weeks (21 days)
- After three weeks remove the ring on the same day of the week that it was inserted
- Have a break for 7 days
- During this 7 day break you are likely to have a bleed
- After a seven day break restart using the ring and continue with this pattern.
Evidence for tricycling and extended use

The traditional contraceptive pill was designed to induce a bleed each month, mimicking naturally occurring menstrual cycles. However, the bleed experienced during the placebo or pill-free week is due to the withdrawal of hormones rather than physiological menstruation, and is not needed.

You can choose whether you prefer to take your combined hormonal contraception in the usual, licensed pattern or with extended use. The instructions leaflet in the box with your contraceptives will usually suggest using the usual licensed pattern but national medical advice says it is just as safe to choose extended use. The benefit of extended use is fewer withdrawal bleeds. There are two ways of extending use which are explained below: tricycling or continuous dosing.

What is tricycling?

This means taking the pill/patch/ring continuously without any breaks for 9 weeks (3 strips/9 patches/3 rings).

You should then take a break for 7 days in a row during which time a bleed is likely to occur. Continue in this way and keep a record of bleeding.

What is continuous dosing?

This means taking the pill/patch/ring continuously without any breaks between strips/patches/rings

- If bleeding requiring use of a pad or tampon occurs at any point for 3 days in a row, then stop the pill/patch/ring for 4 to 7 days in a row
- You should then re-start the method after this break even if the bleeding has not stopped. This discourages further irregular bleeding
- Continue in this way and keep a record of any bleeding
- You have to take a minimum of 7 consecutive days before you have another break.
How to take the combined oral contraceptive pill/patch/ring?

**What if I have changed my medications?**

Check with your doctor/nurse/clinic whether any other medication/s you are taking will affect the pill.

**What if I miss pills/patch/ring?**

A missed pill is a pill that is completely omitted (i.e. more than 24 hours have passed since the pill was due (48 hours since last pill taken)). Please make an appointment if you missed two or more pills or if your break has been longer than 7 days.

Incorrect use of the patch/ring is defined if you have been without or delayed the change of the ring/patch for more than 48 hours during use or extended your patch/ring free interval for more than 7 days.

**How long can I continue using the pill/patch/ring?**

For as long as you like, up to the age of 50 years old providing you have no medical or family history or use any medication that mean these methods are not safe for you to use. Please make an appointment if you have changes in your medical history, medication (including medication you buy over the counter), or any new symptoms.

**Smoking and the pill/patch/ring**

To take these methods over the age of 35 years old, you should not have smoked for the previous 12 months.
How do I find out more?
If you have any further questions please make an appointment: by calling our central booking line for Camden and Islington 020 3317 5252
Hillingdon 01895 488 890
Or visit www.cnwl.nhs.uk/sexualhealth

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Arabic

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