

Did you know there are **different ways** in which you can take your **combined contraceptive pill?**

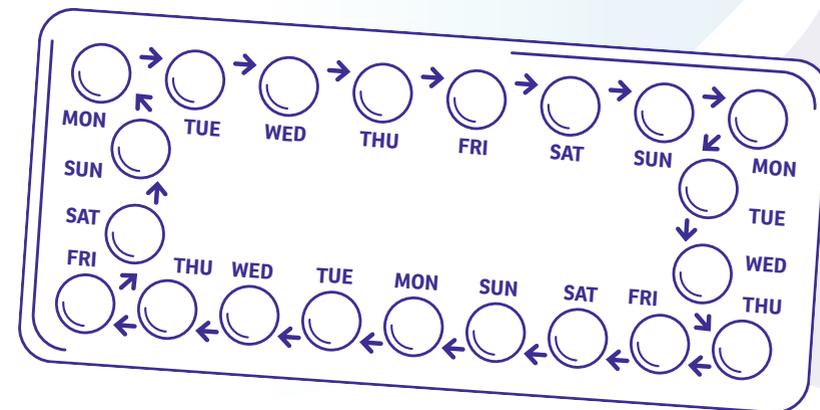
Traditional or 'Standard' regimen

The combined pill was originally designed and licensed to be taken so women would have a bleed every 4 weeks. This is called a hormone 'withdrawal bleed' which is similar to a natural period but can often be lighter and shorter. It happens because you are not taking any hormones in the pill-free week.

You have three strips of pills in each 3-month packet of the combined contraceptive pill. The 21-day pill packs contain 21 active hormone pills on each strip.



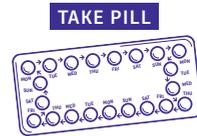
If you would prefer to have a regular monthly bleed then we recommend the standard regimen is the best way to take the pill for you.



How to take 21-day pills

- Start on the first or second day of your period and no later than by day 5. Alternatively, you may be advised to start straight away. This is called 'quick starting' and only suitable if there is no pregnancy risk. If quick starting you will be advised to use additional precautions (condoms) for the first seven days.
- Take your 1st pill from the pill strip marked with the correct day of the week. Continue to take a pill at the same time each day until the pill strip is finished.
- Once you have taken the full 21 pills, stop for 7 days (during these 7 days expect to get your 'withdrawal' bleed).
- Start your next pack of pills on the 8th day, whether you are still bleeding or not. This will always be the same day of the week as when you took your 1st pill.
- It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding on pill-taking days when you first start the combined contraceptive pill. This should settle given time.
- If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding on your pill-taking days after the first 3 months of pill-taking or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding or bleeding after sex then we advise you to speak with your pill supplier. It may mean you need a sexual health check-up or could try a different pill.

Traditional regimen:



21 days

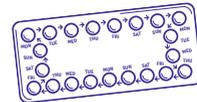


BREAK

7 days



TAKE PILL



21 days

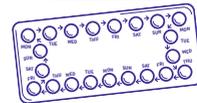


BREAK

7 days



TAKE PILL



21 days



BREAK

7 days



Shortened hormone pill-free break or the 4-day break

You can take a shortened break i.e. 4 pill-free days instead of 7.

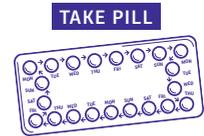
- Take one pill every day for 21 days (this is the number of pills in one strip, you will have three strips in each packet) - Start on the first or second day of your period and no later than by day 5 after the start of your period.
- Alternatively, you may be advised to start straight away. This is called 'quick starting' and only suitable if there is no pregnancy risk. If quick starting you will be advised to use additional precautions (condoms) for the first seven days.
- When you have finished the 21-day strip, you should only take a four-day pill free break. During these four days you are likely to have a bleed that is often shorter and lighter than your natural period.
- On the fifth day you should start your next strip of pills at the same time of day as usual, even if you are still bleeding.



You might want to use an app or phone reminder to help you remember.

We know you will use up your pills more quickly with this and all the alternative pill-taking methods. Just remember to rebook your next appointment in time to collect more pills to avoid running out.

Shortened regimen:

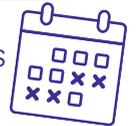


21 days

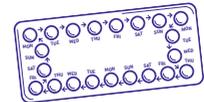


BREAK

4 days



TAKE PILL



21 days

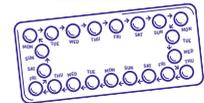


BREAK

4 days



TAKE PILL



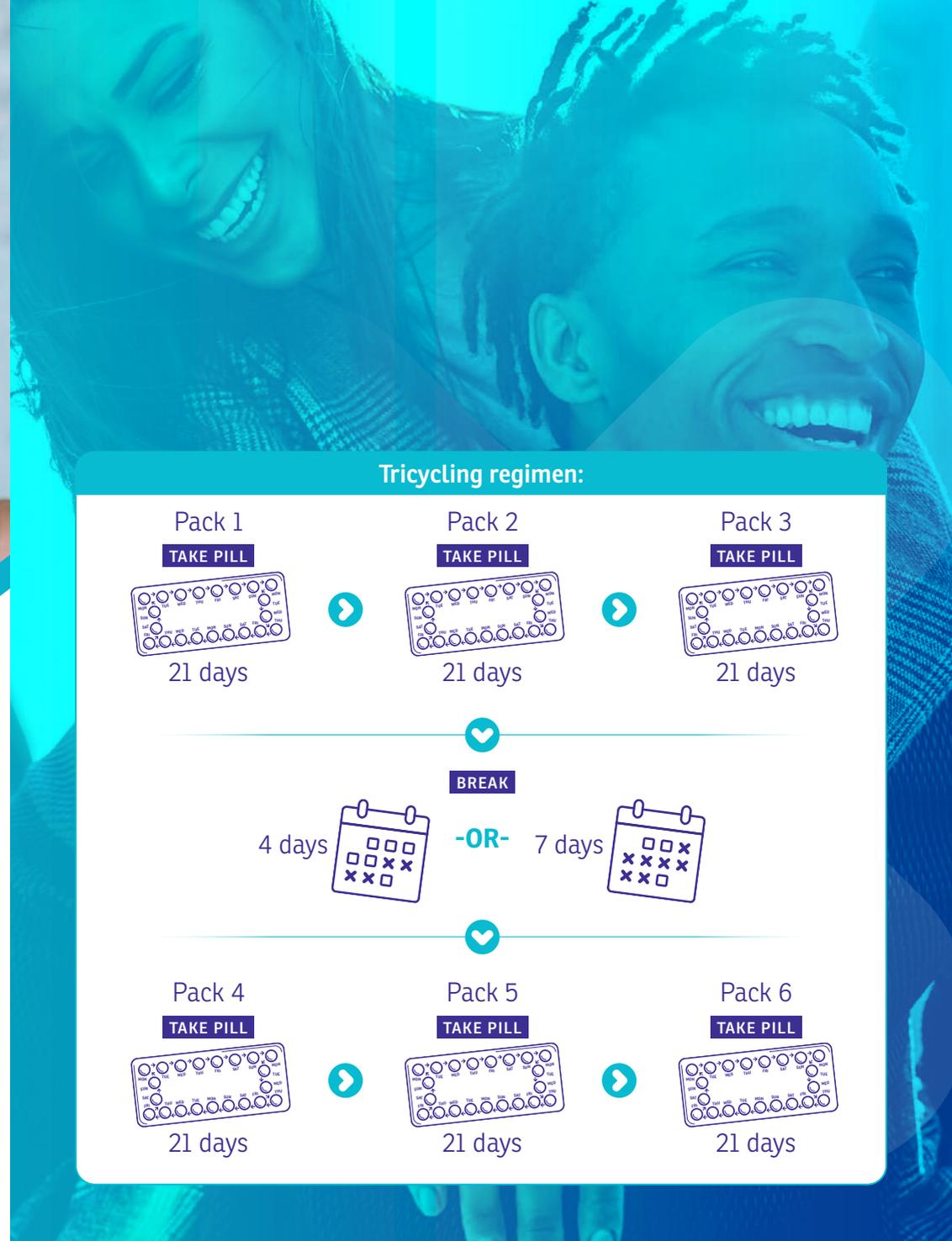
21 days



BREAK

4 days



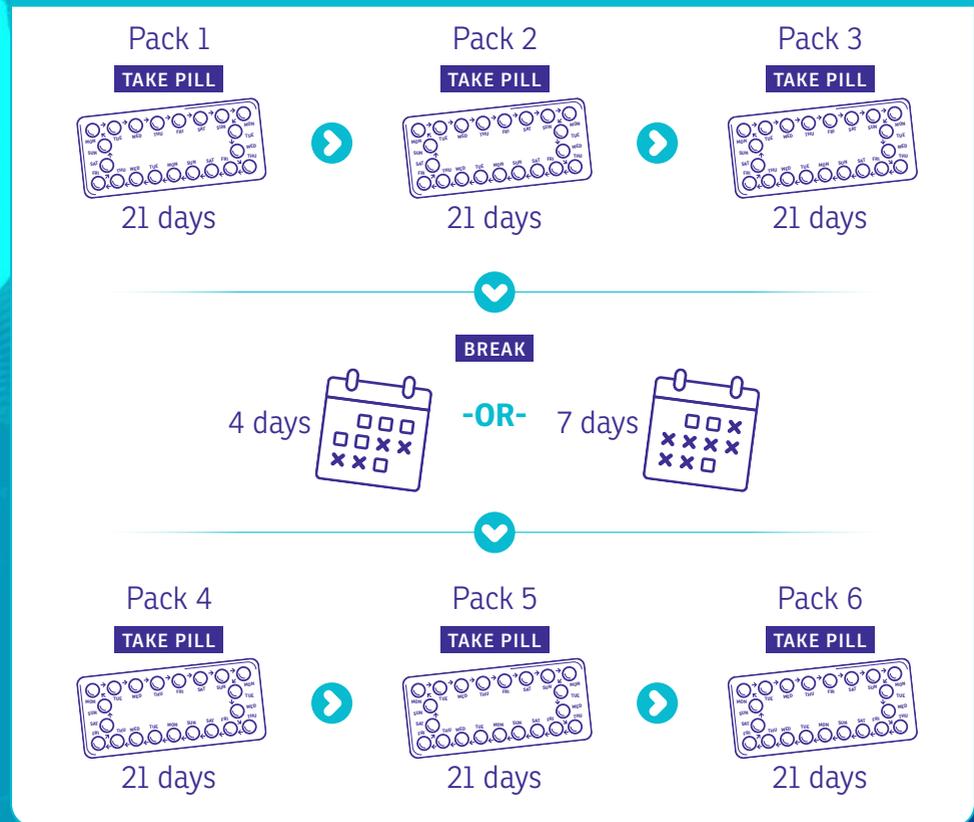


'Tricycling' regimen

- ▶ With this pill-taking method you take three strips of 21-day pills back to back without taking a break, then have either 4-day or 7-day break, followed by another three strips of the pill continuously without taking a break.
- ▶ By taking the combined contraceptive pill this way it will reduce the number of bleeds you have and is often helpful in alleviating some of the bothersome side effects e.g. hormone withdrawal headaches or painful bleeds, which some women experience in their pill-free week.



Tricycling regimen:



Choosing to take the combined contraceptive pill the continuous-taking way, also known as a **'Tailored'** regimen

Choosing to take the pill continuously (taking the 21 active hormone pills, completing the foil pill strip, then going straight on to the next pill strip without taking a 4- or 7-day break is a safe option and one that many women may prefer.

This is because it gives women the power to choose when, or if, they have their bleed.

If you have a special event coming up, it's examination time or maybe planning to go camping, to the beach, or on holiday and you don't want to worry about getting any bleeding, this could be a great option for you and is safe to do.



For continuous pill taking the following is advised:

- ▶ If you bleed for 2 days in a row whilst taking your pill continuously you may take either, a 4-day break or a 7-day break, to have a bleed, as long as you have taken at least 21 pills continuously prior to this break.
- ▶ To help you remember, discard the 4 or 7 pills from your pill strip so you restart on the correct day.
- ▶ During these four or seven days not taking the pill expect to continue to bleed.
- ▶ On either the 5th or 8th Day, depending on the length of break chosen, restart your pill, taking one pill every day continuously again as before. If you are still bleeding when due to restart the pill this should settle quickly once you are retaking it.
- ▶ If you get 2 days of bleeding in a row again, as long as you have taken 21-days of the combined contraceptive pill continuously you can take a 4-day or 7-day break again.
- ▶ There must be at least 21 days of pill-taking between these breaks.
- ▶ It is very common for women to start bleeding at some point during their continuous pill-taking, for example, during every fourth strip of pills. If you find this is happening regularly then you can arrange to take a planned break of 4-days or 7-days at the time this normally happens. This way it should give you control over when the bleed occurs.
- ▶ If you know you have a special event or holiday coming up and you don't want to be bleeding for it you can plan to take a timed 4-day or 7-day break so the bleed has finished before the event. This is, as long as there has been 21 days of continuous pill taking prior to the break.
- ▶ It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding on pill-taking days when you first start the combined contraceptive pill. This should settle given time.
- ▶ If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding after the first 3 months of pill-taking or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding or bleeding after sex then we advise you to speak with your pill supplier. It may mean you need a sexual health check-up or could try a different pill.

Commonly asked questions about pill-taking

Is it safe to take the pill a different way?

Shortened break, tricycling and continuous pill taking regimens are what's known as an 'off-licence' prescription, as the pills are being taken in a different way to how they were originally licensed. Using the combined pill any of these different ways is not harmful and supported nationally by the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) and internationally by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

What are the benefits of taking the pill this way?

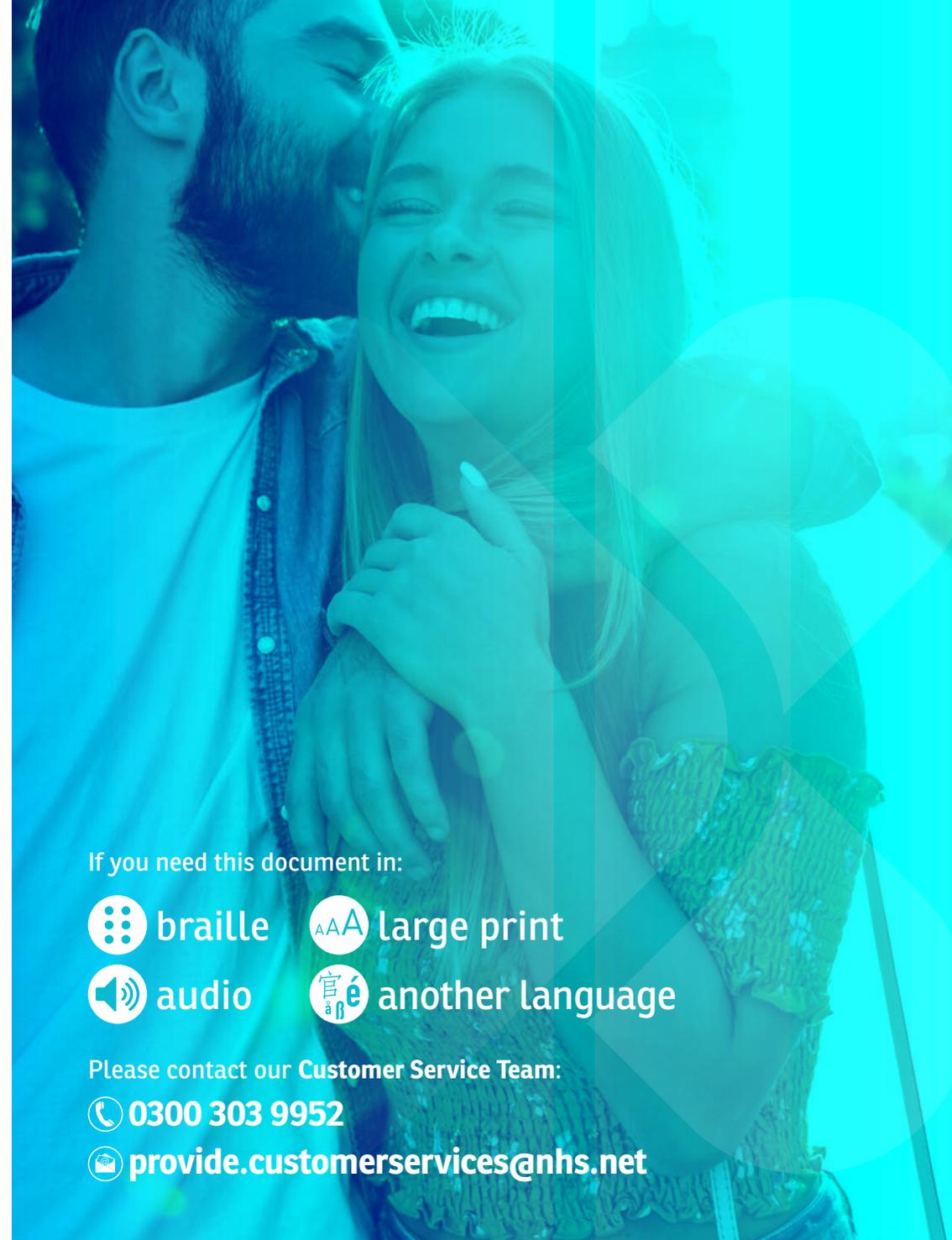
Using tricycling or the continuous pill taking regimens reduces the frequency of withdrawal bleeds and associated symptoms (e.g. headache or mood change).

These regimens could also be useful for women who have heavy or painful bleeding or problems associated with the pill-free week.

Some women find it easier to remember to take the pill these ways.

There is no build-up of menstrual blood inside a woman who uses the pill for an extended time without a break as extended pill use keeps the lining of the womb thin.

Using any of these different methods for taking the pill does not affect the return of a woman's fertility when she stops the pill.



If you need this document in:



braille



large print



audio



another language

Please contact our **Customer Service Team:**



0300 303 9952



provide.customerservices@nhs.net

ESSEX sexual health SERVICE

- ✕ Contraception
- ✕ STI testing and treatment
- ✕ Pregnancy advice
- ✕ And much more...

eshs.org.uk | 0300 003 1212

Part of the

Provide
community

provide.org.uk