

# Continuous Birth Control Pill Use and Extended Cycling

## Frequently Asked Questions

This flyer helps answer common questions about continuous birth control use and extended cycling.

### **What is the difference between continuous birth control use and extended cycling?**

- Taking continuous birth control pills means you only take the pills containing hormones. You skip all the spacer pills in a pack, which are the pills without hormones. You never take a break to have a period.
- Extended cycling means that you take a break for a period every 3 or 4 months but not every month.

### **How can continuous birth control pills or extended cycling help me?**

- People who have problems with bleeding or cramps may find it useful to have very few or no periods.
- People with a hormone imbalance may find that continuous birth control pills help correct it.
- People who have trouble with hygiene may want to get rid of periods.
- Some people just like the convenience of not having a period.
- Continuous birth control pill use may work better to prevent pregnancy than when you are having a period each month.

### **Will menstrual blood build up in my uterus if I don't have a period each month?**

No. The hormones in the pills, estrogen and progesterone, keep your uterine lining very thin and at the same level over many months. This uterine lining is part of your body and cannot get too old.

### **Why do most birth control pill packs have spacer pills?**

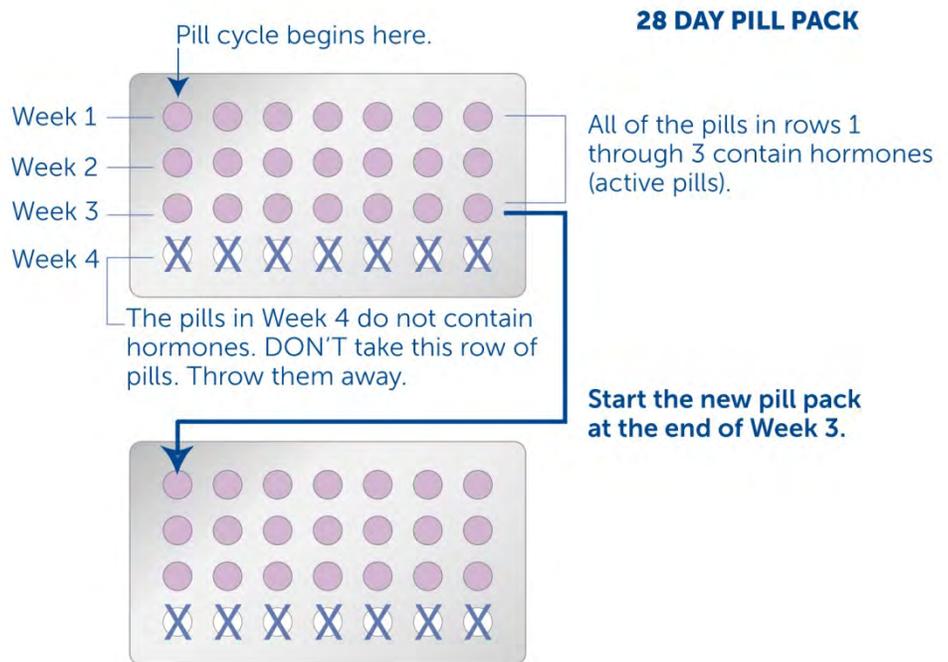
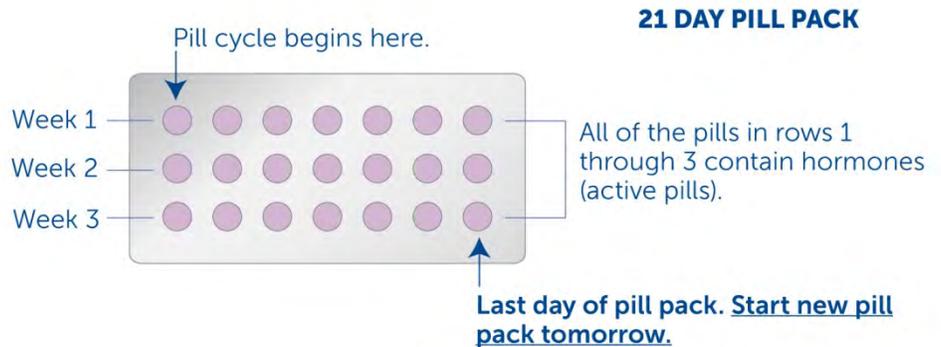
The spacer pills are not in the pack for health or safety reasons, but simply because some people feel reassured by taking the spacer pills and having a period each month.

### **Are there risks to continuous birth control pill use or extended cycling?**

Studies show that the risks of taking birth control pills and having no period, or few periods, are the same as taking birth control pills and having a period each month.

## How do I take pills continuously or do extended cycling with my type of pill pack?

There are different kinds of packs. Some are 21-day pill packs and some are 28-day pill packs.



### To Learn More

- Adolescent Medicine  
206-987-2028
- Your child's  
healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

## Does irregular bleeding or spotting happen on continuous birth control pill use and extended cycling?

Spotting is when the amount of blood is so small that no pad or tampon is needed. Spotting or irregular bleeding is most common during the first 6 months of pill use, as your body gets used to the constant level of hormones. Spotting and irregular bleeding may happen if you miss a pill or have an infection.

If it has been at least 21 days since you started and you are spotting or having irregular bleeding, you can take a break for 3 to 7 days. After the break, restart taking the pills containing hormones. Usually your bleeding will stop within 3 days of restarting the pills.

## How can I prevent spotting?

- The best way to prevent spotting is to take your pill at the same time each day. This keeps a steady level of hormones in your body.
- Continue to take your pill. You do not need to stop the pill if you have spotting. Keep taking it each day and the spotting should stop.

## Will taking birth control pills cause any problems if I want to have children in the future?

No. Taking birth control pills, either continuously or having a monthly period, will not affect your ability to have children in the future.

## Does taking birth control protect me from STIs?

No, birth control pills do **not** protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you are in a sexual relationship, use a barrier method (such as condoms) and be tested for infections regularly.

## When should I call my healthcare provider?

Call your healthcare provider if:

- You are bleeding heavily, soaking a large pad or tampon every hour for more than 2 hours.
- You are bleeding for more than 7 days.
- You have:
  - Abdominal or stomach pain
  - Chest pain or shortness of breath
  - Headaches, dizziness or weakness
  - Eye problems (blurred vision, vision loss)
  - Severe leg pain

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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