

WHAT IS IT?

Taking the pill continuously is simply another way of using oral contraceptives. Users of this method take active (hormone) pills only, with no break between packs. This method makes it possible to reduce the number of menstrual periods per year and is beneficial to your health. All women may use this method if they so choose, but it is particularly beneficial to women who have heavy, painful periods.

IS IT NECESSARY TO MENSTRUATE EVERY 28 DAYS?

No. Even though regular 28-day cycles have always existed, women in ancient times menstruated far less frequently over the course of their lives than women do today.

Menarche (the beginning of menstrual periods) often occurred later and their regular cycles were separated by long stretches of time during which they were pregnant or breastfeeding. Consequently, our ancestors had far less frequent periods than do women nowadays. Regular menstrual cycles appeared with civilization and a modern lifestyle, approximately 10,000 years ago.

The only purpose of a regular cycle is to provide a woman with 13 chances of becoming pregnant per year. For women who do not want to have a child in the near future, regular menstruation has no purpose.

As soon as a woman uses oral contraceptives, an artificial cycle is created, regardless of whether she takes the pill continuously or in the usual 21/7 manner. Initially, the pattern of taking active pills for 21 days then stopping for 7 days was to make it easier to market the product. Mimicking a woman's natural cycle made the pill's use more acceptable.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF TAKING THE PILL CONTINUOUSLY?

Increase in contraceptive effectiveness

Pregnancies that occur while a woman is on the pill are often due to forgetting to take pills at the beginning or end of a pack. Since there are fewer breaks with the continuous method, there is a lower risk of pregnancy.

Control over the menstrual cycle

When oral contraceptives were taken by the traditional method, there were times (trips, vacations, athletic competitions) when women could choose not

to get their period by immediately starting a new pack without taking the inactive (sugar) pills at the end of the 21-day period of active pills. Taking the pill continuously is just a way of using this method over several months. It then becomes easy to choose the time that is most convenient for having a menstrual period.

Decrease in the undesirable symptoms of menstruation

Menstrual periods have many unpleasant physical and psychological symptoms: cramps, premenstrual syndrome, breast tenderness, migraine, heavy bleeding that can even lead to anemia, etc. By decreasing the number of menstrual periods, taking the pill continuously reduces these undesirable symptoms.

Decreasing the impact of your menstrual periods on your quality of life

For teenage girls, menstrual periods are a common cause of absenteeism from school. Many women cut back on their physical activities during this time. Many women feel more tired during their menstrual periods and some report that they are less productive at work or that their usual activities require more effort. Taking the pill continuously makes it possible to avoid these period-related inconveniences.

Decrease in the number of migraines that can occur between packs

Headaches and symptoms of low estrogen levels (hot flashes, fatigue, etc.) can occur on the days when women take the inactive pills. Headaches are triggered by a drop in hormone levels in the blood. When the pill is taken continuously, these hormone levels do not fluctuate and the headaches that accompany menstruation can be eliminated.

Improvement in the quality of life of women approaching menopause

Oral contraceptives are already being used to counter the effects of perimenopause on menstrual regularity and hot flashes. Unfortunately, hot flashes often occur when the inactive pills are being taken. When the pill is taken continuously, these hot flashes can be prevented and women can make their cycles regular and even avoid getting their period.

Decrease in the risk of certain types of cancer

Taking the pill continuously has the same beneficial effect on ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer as taking the pill on the 21/7 schedule. Theoretically, taking the pill continuously should provide even more protection against these cancers. Additionally, taking

the pill continuously has not been associated with any increase in the risk of breast cancer or cardiovascular disease. As for the return of fertility, it occurs as quickly as when the pill is taken in the usual 21/7 manner.

Treatment of endometriosis

Endometriosis is a disease in which endometrial tissue (the tissue that lines the uterus) develops outside the uterus. This disease affects 3% to 10% of women of childbearing age and 25% to 35% of infertile women. It is a frequent cause of abdominal pain, infertility, and menstrual cramps. It is also known that this condition is caused and aggravated by repeated menstrual cycles. Taking the pill continuously is already being used to treat this disease and makes it possible to reduce the pain associated with menstruation.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF TAKING THE PILL CONTINUOUSLY?

The side effects and contraindications are the same as those for taking oral contraceptives the usual way. According to studies, the side effects of taking the pill continuously are experienced mainly at the beginning of pill use. Some women report breast tenderness and abdominal bloating. Some women report

breakthrough bleeding during the first few months of continuous pill use.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Taking the pill continuously makes it possible to better control the menstrual cycle because you can choose when you want to take a break. To take the pill continuously, it is best if you have already been taking oral contraceptives the usual way for one or two months.

You can then, gradually increase the number of months without menstruating. When bleeding occurs after one or more months of being on the pill and the bleeding persists, you must stop taking the pill for 7 days. Stopping for just 4 days is also possible. This increases the effectiveness of the pill and reduces the side effects of menstruation.

After that, you resume the pack from where you stopped. You must always remember that, before stopping to have a period, you must take at least 3 weeks of pills in order for them to be effective. If you are concerned about not having a period, you can choose to take a break every 3 months. If you forget to take several pills and have sex during this time, you must ensure that you are not pregnant.

All oral contraceptive pills may be used continuously. Once all the active pills in the pack have been taken, a new pack is begun without taking the seven day break.

Revised: March 2009

Taking the Pill Continuously

Clinique de planning des naissances
[Birth Control Clinic]
CRSSSR-N
150, avenue Rouleau
Rimouski (Québec) G5L 5T1
Phone : 418 724-8578

www.planningchrr.com