

Hormonal Birth Control: Extended or Continuous Use

What is extended or continuous use of hormonal birth control?

Extended use is when you use your birth control method for 2 or more cycles without stopping the hormones, then take a planned, hormone-free break of 3-7 days. By extending the number of days between hormone-free breaks, you will have fewer periods.

- You will have your period during the hormone-free break.
- When you restart your birth control after the hormone-free break, this is considered a new cycle.
- You must take at least 21 days of birth control between hormone-free breaks in order to prevent pregnancy.

Continuous use is when you use your birth control method without stopping the hormones and don't take scheduled hormone-free breaks. You will have fewer or no periods.

Extended or continuous use of **birth control prevents pregnancy as effectively as using it with hormone-free breaks**. It's safe to not have a period every month when taking birth control this way – the lining of your uterus doesn't build up and doesn't need to be shed.

Which hormonal birth control products can I use?

Only some methods of hormonal birth control can be used in a continuous or extended way. The method needs to have both estrogen and progestin (e.g., most birth control pills, birth control patch, and birth control ring). Talk with your health care provider to see if taking hormonal birth control in a continuous or extended way is right for you.

What are the benefits of extended or continuous use?

- you can choose to have fewer periods or no period at all
- it may decrease symptoms related to your period
- it may make your periods less painful and decrease pelvic pain

What are the disadvantages of extended or continuous use?

- having fewer periods might make it hard to tell if you become pregnant
- you may have unpredictable spotting or bleeding

What are the side effects of extended or continuous use?

The short-term side effects are the same as when you use your method of birth control with hormone-free breaks. The long-term effects are not known. There is a chance (most likely in the first 3 months) that you might have increased spotting or bleeding between periods.

What can I do if I have spotting or bleeding between periods?

Spotting or bleeding between periods is common and should get better over time. If you have taken your birth control for at least 21 days, and continue to have spotting or bleeding that is a problem for you, then consider trying a hormone-free break:

1. Take a hormone-free break of 3-7 days. If the break is longer than 7 days, you won't be protected from pregnancy.
2. Restart your birth control after the 3–7 day break, even if you are still spotting or bleeding. This should help with your spotting or bleeding between periods. Talk with your health care provider if it doesn't improve.

Do a pregnancy test if you have:

- not been using your birth control product the right way
- unexpected changes in vaginal bleeding
- symptoms of pregnancy (e.g., sore chest/breasts, feeling tired, or feeling sick to your stomach)

What if I forgot or am late with my birth control?

If you forget or are late with taking your birth control:

- Follow the directions for the method you are using, or
- Contact your healthcare provider or Health Link (811) for more information.

Think about getting emergency contraception if you:

- Took your birth control late during the first 21 days of a new cycle, or
- Took more than a 7 day hormone-free break at any time, or
- Miss 7 days or less AND then miss more birth control in the next 21 days.

If your hormone-free break was longer than 7 days or you used emergency contraception, you will need to use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or not have vaginal sex for the first 7 days of your new cycle before you are protected from pregnancy.

Did you know?

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There's an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.
- You can help prevent HIV by taking a pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit www.prepalberta.ca to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can help prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyorNotAlberta.ca
- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.



Scan for more information