
▶ **What is continuous use?**

This means using your birth control pill, patch or ring without any planned hormone-free intervals

▶ **What is extended use?**

This means using your birth control pill, patch or ring with planned hormone-free intervals two or more months apart.

▶ **Is it safe to use?**

- With longer-term use, the lining of the uterus does not build up as much, so monthly bleeding is not needed.
- Future fertility is not affected.
- It is not known to increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, or cancer.

▶ **Is it effective?**

The effectiveness of continuous use is equal to regular use (approximately 99 per cent). It does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

▶ **What are the advantages of extended or continuous use?**

- Fewer days of bleeding, lighter flow, less cramping during hormone-free interval
- Fewer headaches, mood changes, breast tenderness, and bloating

▶ **What are the disadvantages to extended or continuous use?**

- Unexpected bleeding and spotting may occur.
- If there is contraceptive failure it may take longer to recognize pregnancy. However, this will not cause harm to a fetus.
- Higher birth control costs because more medication is needed per year

CAUTION

▶ **Seek medical attention at once if you notice any of the following:**

- Severe pain in your legs or abdomen
- Severe chest pain, cough and/or shortness of breath
- Blurring or loss of vision, speech problems
- Depression
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin).

Contact your healthcare provider if any side effects continue after the first three (3) months.

▶ **What to do if unscheduled bleeding occurs?**

- It is common to have unscheduled bleeding when a contraceptive is first started.
- If bleeding continues for seven days, take a 3 to 7 day break from your pill, patch or ring then restart. It is safe to do this as long as you have had at least 21 consecutive days of hormonal coverage.
- If bleeding continues to be a problem, contact your health care provider.

▶ **How is continuous or extended use started?**

- Start within the first 5 days of menstrual bleeding

or
- Use the 'quick start' method by starting any time during your cycle as long as pregnancy has been ruled out, and you use condoms (back up birth control) for 7 days
- Decide when you want to take your hormone free interval (HFI). It must be after at least 21 days of consecutive use
- The HFI should never be greater than 7 days

▶ **What if I forget my pill, patch or ring?**

If you forget your pill, patch or ring during the first 2 weeks of starting or restarting, refer to the specific fact sheet for instructions.

If you have been using your pill, patch or ring for 21 days or longer and:

- you have missed up to seven days:
 - consider this your HFI, and restart your contraceptive
- you have missed more than seven days:
 - contact your health care provider to discuss the need for emergency contraception, restarting birth control, and the need for back up birth control or pregnancy testing

▶ **Resources**

www.sexualityandu.ca

▶ **Who can you talk to if you have more questions?**

If you have concerns or questions, call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit the health unit website below.



**simcoe
muskoka**
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

Tel: 705-721-7520
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520
www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

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Extended or Continuous Use of Contraceptive Pill, Patch or Ring

