

Gynecology & Obstetrics (Women's Care Center of Memphis, M PLLC)

DECREASING MENSTRUAL PERIODS WITH BIRTH CONTROL PILLS (BCP'S)

Usually, BCPs are prescribed in packs of 28 pills. They contain 21 hormone pills and 7 inactive sugar pills. You generally have your period during the 7 days of sugar pills.

For many women this regimen is not ideal. Some women wish to delay their periods or prevent them entirely. Reasons for this may include unpleasant symptoms during menstruation such as: severe cramps, headaches, prolonged or heavy bleeding, endometriosis, hot flashes, PMS, flare ups of other medical problems, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, or simply inconvenience during weddings, athletic events, vacations, etc.

There is a safe and effective way to achieve prolonged menstrual suppression for women who have these difficulties. It is done by simply taking an extended interval of active hormone containing pills. This can be done with any monophasic pill (the hormone level is the same in all 21 active pills). This will not work with phasic or cyclic pills (the hormone level and pill color changes from week to week during the active pills).

There are two common methods for doing this.

Method One

- Take an active pill everyday for nine weeks in a row and throw away the sugar pills.
- At the end of nine weeks (this would be three packs of pills), take 7 days off (no pills).
- Then repeat the cycle throughout the year—nine weeks on and one week off.
- This will give you a period every 10th week rather than the usual every 4th week.

Some people may have some spotting before the nine weeks are up. Other may not wish to have a period as often as every 10th week. Because of this, another method was devised.

Method Two

- Always take at *least* 21 active pills in a row.
- Take an active pill everyday until you have bleeding. It is possible for some women to do this for a year or more without having a period.
- After taking at least 21 active pills, if you have bleeding or spotting take 4-7 days off the pills.
- *Never* take more than 7 days off or you could get pregnant.
- *Never* take any days off unless you have taken at least 21 days of active pills (even if you are bleeding) or you could get pregnant.
- If you take off less than 7 days, don't forget to re-label your pill pack with the new day of the week

on which you resumed taking active pills.

Common Questions

1. *Isn't it unhealthy not to have your period every month?*

If you are taking the pill as described here it is perfectly okay not to have a period as long as you are taking active pills. There is no build up of the uterine lining because the progestin hormone in the pill keeps the uterine lining very thin.

2. *What if I have breakthrough bleeding and I have only been taking the active pills for 14 days? Can I go off 7 days?*

NO. You must take active pills for at least 21 days to be certain ovulation is prevented.

3. *What happens if I go off the pill for more than 7 days?*

You could get pregnant. If you have not had intercourse during this time you can resume your pills when you remember and use a backup method of birth control such as condoms for at least 7 days. If you have had intercourse during this time you need to wait until the first day of your next period to resume active pills.