Different ways to take the combined contraceptive pill

Traditional method

The pill was designed so that women would still have a ‘period’ each month, to mimic a natural cycle. This is the way the pill was originally licenced to be used. If you would like to have a regular monthly bleed, you can take your pill in this way.

* Take one pill every day for 21 days, starting on the first day of your period (or as instructed by your doctor or nurse)
* When you have finished the packet, have a 7 day pill free break. During these 7 days you will usually have a bleed, which may be shorter and lighter than your usual period.
* On the 8th day start the next packet, even if you are still bleeding. This means you will always start your new packet of pills on the same day of the week. It is really important not to make the gap between pills more than 7 days as you are much more likely to get pregnant

Tailored / Continuous pill taking

* With this method you take the pill continuously - so as soon as you finish one packet you start the next the following day.
* If you have a bleed for 2 days in a row (a ‘breakthrough bleed’) while taking the pill, then stop taking the pill for 4 days (take these pills out of the packet and throw them away so you stay on the correct day of the week).
* During these 4 days you will continue to bleed.
* On the 5th day start taking your pill again, and continue taking until your next breakthrough bleed.
* Make sure you take the pill for at least 14 days between the 4 day breaks. If you are getting bleeding or spotting more than every 2 weeks, you should speak to a GP or nurse

Is tailored / continuous pill taking safe?

Tailored pill taking is an example of ‘off licence’ prescribing as the pills are being used in a different way from how they were originally licenced to be used. There is no evidence that taking the pill in this way is harmful and the World Health Organisation recommends this method.