NHS Tayside

Taking the pill for bleeding problems with the 'rod'

Patient information leaflet

Tayside Sexual and Reproductive Health Service

The contraceptive implant (Nexplanon®, the rod) is a convenient and very effective form of contraception. However, a common side effect is irregular vaginal bleeding. About 3 in 10 people with the contraceptive implant experience frequent or prolonged bleeding. Many find using a menstrual chart or an app to monitor their bleeding very helpful. Sometimes the issue settles with time but for some implant users, the bleeding remains troublesome.

Bleeding whilst on the contraceptive implant is rarely caused by something serious, especially if the issue only started after the insertion of the implant. However, **other causes for your bleeding need to be excluded**. You should be up to date with your STI infection screen as STIs can cause bleeding. If you are over 25, make sure you are up to date with your smears too. If your bleeding has lasted for more than 3 months, your nurse or doctor should examine you and have a look at your neck of the womb (cervix) to make sure it looks healthy.

If no other cause for the bleeding was found, they might then offer you treatment, like the pill.

Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill

The combined oral contraceptive pill (COC, "the pill") is a form of tablet contraception that contains two hormones. On its own, it can be used to reduce heavy periods. It can also be used in combination with the implant to reduce troublesome bleeding caused by it. This can be very effective.

Not everyone can take the COC. For instance, if you are very overweight, suffer from migraine with aura, previously had a blood clot or have very high blood pressure, the COC may not be safe for you.

Your healthcare professional will discuss this with you and determine if the benefits outweigh the risks of you taking the pill on top of your implant.

There are two ways to take the COC to reduce bleeding whilst on the implant:

- take the pill for 21 consecutive days, followed by a 7-day break. Most will have a break-through bleed during the break, but this is usually light and the timing is predictable.

or

- take the pill continuously without a break.

Both options are safe and you can choose which fits your lifestyle best. Try not to miss any pill as this could make your bleeding worse. On the other hand, many find it reassuring to know that they do not get pregnant should they miss a pill as they still have their implants providing contraception.

When used in combination with the implant, the COC is usually prescribed for 3 months. Often, the bleeding will have settled by then. **If the bleeding has not stopped or returns when you stop the COC, please speak to your healthcare professional**. They might prescribe you a further course of the pill or discuss alternative contraceptive methods.

It is important to know that using the COC in this way is not licensed as you are already on a contraceptive method. However, it is thought to be safe and is the treatment recommended by the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health (FSRH) who sets our standards around contraceptive methods.

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https://www.careopinion.org.uk/tellyourstory?nacs=T101H-sex-health

You can find more information about this here:
https://www.nhstayside.scot.nhs.uk/GoingToHospital/GiveUsFeedback/PROD_320144/index.htm

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This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats on request

Speak to the nurse/health professional looking after you to arrange this