



FAQs for members

Frequently Asked Questions about _____

Extended-Cycle Use of Birth Control Pills (Formulary Alternative to Seasonale®)

Background

- Most birth control pills (BCPs) are designed to mimic a woman's natural cycle and are based on a 28-day regimen [21 days of active tablets, followed by either 7 days of inactive (placebo) tablets or 7 pill-free days, during which menstruation should occur].
- Extended-cycle use of BCPs involves extending the length of a cycle beyond the typical 28-day regimen of most BCPs. Physicians have been prescribing extended-cycle use of BCPs for many years by instructing patients to skip the inactive tablets so that the active pills are taken consecutively for an extended period of time.
- Seasonale is the first BCP to be approved by the FDA for extended-cycle use. Seasonale is a 91-day (13-week) regimen taken daily as 84 active tablets, followed by 7 days of inactive tablets to give women 4 menstrual cycles per year instead of the usual 13 cycles per year with a 28-day regimen.
- Seasonale is not on the Kaiser Permanente Formulary. Levlen® 28, which **contains the same active ingredients in the same amounts** as Seasonale, is available on the Formulary at the lower tiered copay. Levlen 28 can be taken as an extended-cycle regimen to mimic Seasonale.

Why do physicians prescribe extended-cycle use of BCPs?

- The most common reasons are for non-contraceptive benefits. Examples include:
 - To decrease blood loss and the incidence of iron-deficiency anemia.
 - To decrease the incidence of painful menstruation.
 - To reduce symptoms of premenstrual syndrome and migraines related to menstruation.
 - For lifestyle-related reasons in which monthly menstrual cycles are not favorable (military personnel, athletes, travelers).

Which women may NOT be good candidates for an extended-cycle BCP regimen?

- Women who experience frequent breakthrough bleeding when using a 28-day regimen may not be good candidates since longer cycles are associated with higher amounts of breakthrough bleeding and spotting.

How do Levlen and Seasonale compare and how do I take Levlen 28 to get the same effect?

	Levlen 28	Seasonale
Progestin	Levonorgestrel 0.15 mg	Levonorgestrel 0.15 mg
Estrogen	Ethinyl estradiol 0.03 mg	Ethinyl estradiol 0.03 mg
Active tablets	21 tablets (3 weeks) x 4 cycles = 84 tablets (12 weeks)	84 tablets (12 weeks)
Inactive tablets	7 tablets per cycle – Skip inactive (pink) tablets for cycles 1, 2, and 3. Take inactive tablets for cycle 4.	7 tablets
Menstruation	Should occur during the 7 days of cycle 4 that you take the inactive (pink) tablets	Should occur during the 7 days of the cycle that you take the inactive tablets

Can any birth control pill be taken in an extended-cycle regimen?

- No. The extended-cycle method should only be used with monophasic BCPs (each active tablet contains the same doses of estrogen and progestin). Monophasic BCPs may be taken in an extended-cycle manner by skipping the inactive tablets as described in the table with Levlen 28.
- Biphasic or Triphasic BCPs (e.g., Tri-Levlen, Tri-Norinyl, Tri-Sprintec, Necon 10/11) should not be used as an extended-cycle regimen.

What should I know about extended-cycle use of BCPs?

- Initially, women on an extended-cycle regimen are more likely to experience breakthrough bleeding or spotting compared with women on a 28-day cycle regimen. In a study comparing Seasonale with a 28-day cycle regimen, the total days of bleeding and/or spotting (scheduled menstrual bleeding plus breakthrough bleeding) over one year of treatment were similar for both groups.¹ **The inconvenience of unplanned bleeding should be weighed against the convenience of having fewer planned menstrual cycles when choosing extended-cycle use of BCPs.**
- The amount of breakthrough bleeding or spotting usually decreases over time. You should continue to take your BCP throughout all bleeding episodes. In some cases, these symptoms may be due to other medical conditions. If you continue to have bleeding or spotting for more than 7 days, or if it appears to be getting worse or is associated with pain, contact your doctor.
- An extended-cycle regimen provides more weeks per year of hormonal exposure (than a 28-day cycle regimen) and theoretically may increase the risk for blood clots, but studies to date have not suggested an increased risk.¹
- If you miss a dose of your BCP, refer to the package insert provided with the BCP for instructions about what to do.
- If a scheduled period is missed, take a pregnancy test to determine if you are pregnant.
- Birth control pills do not protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Reference:

[¹Seasonale® Prescribing Information. Duramed Pharmaceuticals, Inc. 2003](#)