

# fact sheet

## The Patch

The patch is a method of hormonal birth control in the form of a thin, adhesive patch that is applied to the skin every week for three weeks, then the fourth week is patch-free.

### How does it work?

Hormones released from the patch are absorbed through the skin. Estrogen in the patch suppresses ovulation. Progestin thickens cervical mucus and thins the uterine lining. Together, these actions make egg release, fertilization, and implantation very unlikely.

### How well does it work?

The patch is 99% effective in preventing pregnancy with perfect use and 91% effective with typical use. The patch does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

### How do I use it?

- First, apply a patch to the skin of either the upper arm, abdomen, buttock, or upper back where there is no hair. The skin under the patch should be clean and dry, with no lotions or creams.
- Second, wait one week, then remove the patch. Fold the old patch in half and throw it in the trash. Apply a new patch to a new location immediately.
- Third, repeat this process until you have worn a new patch every week for three weeks. Remove the third patch and do not apply a new patch for the fourth week. After seven patch-free days, begin the monthly cycle again by applying a new patch. Avoid applying a patch on the same site in the same month. Do not apply the patch to the breast, genitals, or to broken or irritated skin.

### What if the patch falls off?

Put the patch back on right away. If the patch will not stick or if the patch has been off for more than 24 hours, apply a new patch to a new site and use a backup method of birth control for the next seven days. The day that you placed the new patch is your new patch change day. If this occurred during the third patch week, skip the patch-free week and apply a new patch on your patch change day.

### What if I forget to change it on time?

Each patch delivers enough hormone to prevent pregnancy for up to nine days of use. If you left it on for longer than that, remove it and apply a new patch to a new location right away. Use a backup method for the next seven days. Consider using emergency contraception if you had sex when the patch was hormone-depleted.

### What are some side effects might I experience?

Though rare, there are serious side effects that can occur when using the patch. These include blood clots and strokes. If you experience sudden and/or severe pain in your abdomen, chest, head, or legs that may be accompanied by dizziness, nausea, vomiting, difficulty catching your breath, or changes in vision or mental status, call your healthcare provider right away and/or get to an emergency room.

You may experience nausea, headache, breast tenderness, or changes in bleeding patterns. These symptoms usually resolve within 3 months of patch use. Some people experience skin irritation.

### What if I want to get pregnant soon?

The patch is a good option for persons thinking about getting pregnant within the next year. Conception can occur as quickly as the first patch-free week.

### Is it right for me?

The ring is an effective, convenient, pill-free option that is safe for most people. Some health conditions make it unsafe to use the patch but the minipill can be used instead (examples: history of blood clots, high blood pressure, and smoker over age 35). The patch may not be the best option if you have a skin condition (such as eczema).