

Facts About

The Contraceptive Patch

What is the contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch is a thin, beige, plastic patch that sticks on the skin to prevent pregnancy. The patch is easy to use. You only have to think about birth control once a week.

How does the patch work?

Like birth control pills, the patch works by releasing female hormones (estrogen and progestin) in your body. These hormones prevent pregnancy by:

- Stopping an egg from leaving the ovaries (ovulation)
- Thickening the cervical mucus making it more difficult for sperm to get to the egg
- Keeping a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus

How well does the patch work?

When used correctly, the patch is about 91%-94% effective. However, the patch can be less effective in women who weigh 198 pounds or more.

Some medicines and herbal products may make the patch less effective, including:

- Barbiturates
- Bosentan (Tracleer)
- Carbamazepine (Tegretol, Equetro)
- Felbamate (Felbatol)
- Grisofulvin (Fulvicin, GrifulvinV, Gris-Peg, Grisactin)
- Oxcarbazepine (Trileptal)
- Phenytoin (Dilantin)
- Rifampin (Rifadin)
- St. John's Wort
- Topiramate (Topamax)

Is there anyone who should not use the patch?

You should not use the patch if:

- You are pregnant or think you might be
- You get migraine headaches with aura
- You have certain inherited blood clotting disorders
- You have ever had a heart attack, stroke, blood clots or angina
- You have ever had liver or breast cancer
- You have uncontrolled high blood pressure
- You have very bad diabetes
- You have serious liver disease (eyeballs are yellow)
- You are on prolonged bed rest

Smoking increases your risk of serious side effects. Women who use birth control methods with hormones should not smoke. This includes electronic cigarettes.

What are the possible side effects of the patch?

The most common side effects of the patch are similar to the birth control pill and include breast tenderness, nausea and vomiting, headache, irritation on the skin where the patch is located, and irregular bleeding.

How do I know if I have a problem from using the patch?

If you have any of these warning signs, call your doctor, nurse or clinic right away:

- Bad pain in your arms or legs or you lose feeling
- Headaches, dizziness or fainting
- Eye problems (if you see flashing lights, have fuzzy vision or suddenly can't see)
- Pain in your stomach or belly, or if you get very sick to your stomach all of a sudden

How do you start using the patch?

There are two ways to start the patch:

1. **Quick Start Method:** Put on your first patch as soon as you get the pack. **OR**
2. **Next Period:** Put on your first patch on the first day of your next period.

If you put on your first patch *up to 5 days after the start of your period*, you are protected against pregnancy **right away**.

If you put on your first patch *more than 5 days after the start of your period*, you should **use condoms as backup for the first 7 days**.

How do you use the patch?

- Place one patch on a clean dry area of your buttock, abdomen, upper outer arm or upper torso, in a place where it will not be rubbed by tight clothing. Make sure the edges of the patch stick well. Do not put the patch on your breasts or chest area.
- You will use a new patch every week for 3 weeks in a row and no patch for the 4th week.
- You will not wear a patch during week four and you should expect your period during this time.

- Put the patch in a different spot from one week to the next.
- Do not wear make-up, creams, lotions, powders or other topical products where you put the patch.
- Remember: Remove the old patch and apply the new patch. Apply every new patch on the same day of the week for three weeks in a row.

What if I stopped using the patch and had unprotected sex?

Take Emergency Contraception (EC) right away. EC can prevent pregnancy up to 5 days after sex, and it works better the sooner you take it. You can get EC at the pharmacy without a prescription or at your county health department family planning clinic or doctor's office.

Can I breastfeed my baby while using the patch?

No. Nursing mothers should not use the patch until they have completely weaned their child.

Where can I get the patch?

You need a prescription. You can get the patch at the drug store or the health department family planning clinic.

REMEMBER:

- The patch does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Protect yourself; use a latex or vinyl condom every time you have oral, vaginal or anal sex.

