

HEALTH MATTERS

Frequently Asked Questions About the Contraceptive Patch

What is the contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch is a highly effective, weekly hormonal birth control patch that is worn on the skin to prevent pregnancy. The patch is worn for one week and replaced on the same day of the week for three consecutive weeks, with the fourth week “patch-free.” Your menstrual period should start during the “patch-free” week. The contraceptive patch available in the United States is called OrthoEvra®.

How effective is contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch is 99 percent effective when used correctly.

How does it work?

The contraceptive patch prevents pregnancy the same way that birth control pills do. It works primarily by preventing the ovary from releasing an egg to be fertilized. The patch also causes changes to the cervical mucus (making it more difficult for sperm to enter the uterus).

The contraceptive patch keeps you from becoming pregnant by delivering hormones (norelgestromin and ethinyl estradiol) through the skin and into the bloodstream. This is called transdermal administration.

Where can I wear the contraceptive patch?

You can wear the contraceptive patch on one of four areas of the body: your buttocks, abdomen, upper torso (front and back, excluding the breasts), or upper outer arm. The patch should not be worn on any other areas of the body. You should not place the patch on skin that is red, irritated, or cut. You should not place it on areas of your skin where makeup, lotions, creams, powders, or other products are or will be applied.

How does the patch stay on?

The contraceptive patch has a layer containing both the medication and an adhesive that keeps the patch on the skin for an entire week. The patch adheres well to the skin, allowing you to perform your daily activities such as bathing, showering, swimming, and exercising without interruption.

What are the benefits of using the contraceptive patch?

Women who use the contraceptive patch are likely to have lighter and less painful periods. The contraceptive patch may protect against some cancers and breast disease.

Who should not use the contraceptive patch?

Some women should not use the contraceptive patch, including women who have blood clots, certain cancers, or a history of heart attack or stroke, as well as those who are or may be pregnant.

What are the downsides?

Some women using the contraceptive patch experience breast tenderness, headache, and reactions at the application. Most side effects are not serious, and those that are, are very rare. Prevention of an unintended pregnancy with FDA-approved contraceptives is always safer than childbirth or abortion. Serious risks are increased if you smoke cigarettes.

Certain drugs may interact with hormonal birth control, including the contraceptive patch, to make them less effective in preventing pregnancy. As with all prescription products, you should tell your health care professional about any other medications you are taking. You may need to use a non-hormonal backup contraceptive, such as a condom, spermicide, or diaphragm, when you take drugs that can make the contraceptive patch less effective.

Where can I get the contraceptive patch?

A trained health care professional (including doctors, nurses, and nurse midwives) can provide you with the contraceptive patch.