

## Where can you get the patch?

The birth control patch requires a prescription from a qualified health care provider. Call your local family planning clinic for information.

# Patch (transdermal contraception)

## How the patch works

The birth control patch is a thin, stick-on, square, 1-3/4 inch patch that allows hormones to enter the bloodstream through the skin. Like birth control pills, a combination of hormones in the patch stops your body from releasing an egg, so no egg can be fertilized. The hormones also cause the cervical mucus (the liquid at the opening of the uterus) to thicken, which can stop sperm from getting into the uterus.

## How to use the patch

The patch is a once-a-week (7 days) method of birth control on a four-week cycle. A new patch must be used each week for three weeks. Menstrual bleeding is expected during the fourth week, when no patch is used.

The patch is placed on healthy skin on the abdomen, buttock, lower back, upper outer arm or upper torso where it will not be rubbed by tight clothing. It should not be placed on the breast.



It is replaced on the same day of the week for three weeks. The fourth week is patch-free. Follow the written instructions that come with the patch.

## Effectiveness

The patch is in the Tier 2 level of contraceptive effectiveness because preventing pregnancy depends on the user keeping the patch in place and changing it on time (each week). Typically 9 out of 100 women are likely to get pregnant within 1 year of use. If a woman forgets to replace the patch once every seven days for three weeks, or forgets to start a new cycle of patches after the fourth week, her chance of getting pregnant goes up.

To increase effectiveness, a woman should keep the patch in place and change it on time using it consistently and correctly.

Ask your health provider about the effectiveness rates for women who weigh more than 200 pounds.

## Benefits of the patch

The patch is small, thin and smooth and can be worn under your clothes. You only have to change it once a week and you can wear it in a different place each week. It stays on while you shower, bathe, swim or exercise. Warm, humid conditions do not decrease its sticking power.

## Potential side effects and disadvantages

Side effects of the patch may include slight nausea, breast symptoms and vaginal spotting and menstrual cramps, especially in the first two cycles. Some women have skin irritation under and around the patch. To decrease the risk of skin irritation, a woman can place the patch on a different part of the body each week.

Using the patch will not provide protection against HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, herpes, genital warts (HPV), gonorrhea, hepatitis B and syphilis.

## Potential risks

Some women should not use the patch because of specific health conditions, such as cardiovascular events. Hormones from patches applied to the skin get into the blood stream and are removed from the body differently than hormones from birth control pills taken by mouth. Ask your health care provider about potential health risks.

Cigarette smoking increases the risk of serious cardiovascular risks (blood clot, heart attack, stroke), especially for women over 35. Women who use the patch are strongly advised not to smoke.