



Using the Birth Control Patch

How It Works

The hormones in your birth control patch move from the adhesive of the patch through your skin to prevent pregnancy by “taking over” the hormones in your body. They prevent the ovary from releasing an egg and thicken the mucous at the entrance of the uterus, blocking sperm from getting in.

How to Use the Patch

- Apply your first patch in one of these three ways, your health care provider will decide which is best for you:
 - **Start your patch the first Sunday after your next period begins, or the first day of your period if your menses begin on a Sunday.**
 - **Start your patch on the first day of your next period.**
 - **Start your patch on the day you are in the doctor’s office.**
- The day you apply your first patch is your “**patch change day**”. Replace the patch once every week on the patch change day for 3 weeks.
- On the 4th week, you will not wear a patch. This is the “**patch free week**”. You will start bleeding this week, usually on the 2nd or 3rd day without a patch.
- After 7 days off the patch, apply another patch on your “**patch change day**”, even if you are still bleeding. You will again use a patch each week for 3 weeks and no patch on the 4th week.
- Breakthrough bleeding (“spotting” or bleeding between your periods) is common and expected in the first 3 months of patch use. **DO NOT** skip or stop your patch. **DO** call our office if you are concerned.
- ***You must always continue to use a condom. The patch does NOT protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV (AIDS).***
- Antibiotics and other medications may decrease the effectiveness of the birth control patches, giving an increased risk of pregnancy or a heavier menses that month. Again, be sure to use a condom!

What if You Forget to Change a Patch?

- ***If an edge or a corner of the patch is loose***, try to press it down again.
- ***If the patch comes off and you are sure it has been off less than 24 hours***, apply a new patch. Stay on the same schedule with your patches and keep the same patch change day.
- ***If your patch comes off and you have no idea when it came off***, apply a new patch and start a new cycle. This becomes patch #1 and is your ***new*** patch change day.

Forgetting to change a patch will decrease its effectiveness, may cause bleeding, and will increase your chances of becoming pregnant. Always use a condom to prevent pregnancy and start a new patch cycle.

Call Your Doctor Right Away if You Have

- **A**bdominal pain (severe)
- **C**hest pain (severe)/shortness of breath
- **H**eadaches (severe)
- **E**ye problems – blurred vision or loss of vision
- **S**evere leg pain (calf or thigh)

Women using the patch have a small increased risk for getting a blood clot in the leg or lung. This risk is very low: about 1 in 15,000 women. If you smoke, this risk increases.

Common Side Effects

Occasionally women starting the patch will have nausea, breast tenderness, headaches or mood changes. If this happens, it is usually mild and does not last long. Birth control patches **do not** cause weight gain. Some women become sensitive to the adhesive and have some redness or itchy skin in that area.

Other Benefits

- Lighter, less painful, more regular periods
- Decreased acne and less unwanted hair growth
- Fewer ovarian cysts
- Fewer benign (harmless) breast lumps
- Fewer pelvic infections
- Lower risk of ovarian and uterine cancer
- Stronger bones