

The Birth Control Patch

What is the birth control patch?

- The patch is used by someone with ovaries inside their body to prevent pregnancy.
- It is a small, light beige square patch placed on the skin.
- It contains artificial hormones that are slowly released into the body through the skin.

How does the patch work?

- The patch stops the ovaries from releasing an egg cell each month. If there is no egg cell, pregnancy is not possible.
- The patch makes the cervical mucus thicker so that it is harder for sperm to get into the cervix.
- It also makes the lining of the uterus thinner, so that it is harder for a fertilized egg cell to stick to the uterus. Even if an egg cell is released and fertilized, if it is unable to implant into the uterine lining a pregnancy will not happen.
- When used correctly, the patch prevents pregnancy 97-99% of the time.

How do I use the patch?

- Place the patch on a fleshy part of the body such as the buttocks, abdomen, or outer arm. Avoid areas with vital organs including the chest, upper back, around the heart, and the head.
- Wear a new patch every week for 3 weeks in a row. To avoid skin sensitivity to the adhesive, wear it in a different place each week.
- Always change the patch on the same day of the week.
- Do not wear the patch during the 4th week (the patch-free week). This is when menstruation will usually occur.
- Following the patch-free week, begin a new 3-week cycle with a new patch.
- The patch is very sticky and should not fall off. It can be worn while swimming, exercising, taking a shower or bath, and during hot and humid weather.

How soon does it start working?

- If you start the patch on the first day of your period, it works immediately.
- If you start the patch any other time during your menstrual cycle, it starts working after 7 days. Use another method of birth control (such as condoms) until it starts working.

Where can I get the patch?

You will need a prescription for the patch. You can get a prescription from:

- Your health care provider
- A Teen Clinic (for youth 21 or younger).
- A walk-in clinic
- A community health clinic

Does the patch protect me from STIs and HIV?

- No, the patch is only for pregnancy prevention.
- Use safer sex supplies such as condoms and sex dams every time you have sex to reduce the risk of STIs (sexually transmitted infection) or HIV.

Are there any side effects?

You may feel some side effects. If they are very uncomfortable or last longer than a few months, talk to your health care provider.

Minor side effects may include:

- Bleeding between periods
- Breast discomfort
- Headaches
- Menstrual cramps
- Skin irritation where the patch touches the skin
- Nausea (upset stomach)

Contact your health provider immediately if you have:

- Leg pain
- Shortness of breath
- Changes in vision
- Sudden and severe headaches
- Weakness or numbness in arms or legs

What if the patch falls off?

- If the patch is off less than 24 hours put it back on. If you cannot find it, or it won't stay on, use a new patch.
- Keep your same patch change day schedule.
- If the patch is off more than 24 hours, pregnancy is a possibility if you are having penis-vagina sex. Put on a new patch as soon as you can and restart your 4-week patch cycle. This will be your new patch change day and day 1 of your patch cycle. Consider using an alternative birth control method, such as condoms, for 7 days.

Is the patch effective for everyone?

Always talk with your health care provider to figure out your personal health needs. Let them know of any pre-existing health conditions and family health history. The patch may not be right for you if:

- You smoke, especially if you are 35 or older.
- You are breastfeeding.
- You have a family history of breast cancer.
- You weigh more than 198lbs. The dosage in the patch may not fit the needs of your body.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse. If you need a regular health care provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life Online: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.
- From a Teen Clinic if you are 21 or younger.
- Online at www.serc.mb.ca or our youth website, www.teentalk.ca.