

The Vaginal Ring

What is the vaginal ring?

- The vaginal ring is a small, soft, flexible plastic ring placed into the vagina to prevent pregnancy.
- It contains artificial hormones similar to the natural hormones that may already exist in your body.
- The ring slowly releases hormones into the body through the vagina.

How does the vaginal ring work?

- The vaginal ring prevents the ovaries from releasing an egg cell each month.
- The ring 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 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 ring prevents pregnancy 97-99% of the time.

How is the vaginal ring used?

- Insert the vaginal ring on the first day of your menstrual period.
- Use your thumb and index finger to press the sides of the ring together. Gently push the folded ring inside your vagina. You can place it anywhere in your vagina.
- If you insert the ring deep in your vagina, you will be less likely to feel it. This will also reduce the chance of it slipping.
- Leave the ring inside your vagina for 3 weeks. Then, remove the ring using your fingers (it should come out easily). You do not need to wear it during the fourth week. You will get your period during this ring-free week.
- After the ring-free week, insert a new ring to continue pregnancy prevention and start a new cycle. Insert the new ring on the same day of the week for each 4-week cycle.

How soon does the vaginal ring start working?

- If you insert the ring during the first 5 days of your period, the ring starts working after 7 days.
- Until the ring starts working (7 days) use another method of birth control (such as condoms).

Does the vaginal ring protect me from STIs and HIV?

- No, the vaginal ring 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
- Nausea
- Vaginal irritation/discharge

What if the vaginal ring comes out?

- If the vaginal ring falls out, rinse it with cool or lukewarm water. Put it back into the vagina immediately. If the ring has been out for more than 3 hours, rinse it with water, put it back into the vagina and keep it in for 7 more days. Then go one week without the ring and start a new cycle.
- If the ring has been out for more than 3 hours, 1st or 2nd week, put it back in and use back-up contraception, like condoms, for 7 days if having penis-vagina sex.
- If the ring has been out for more than 3 hours, 3rd week, discard and use new ring immediately. Use back-up contraception, like condoms, for 7 days if having penis-vagina sex.

What if I forget to insert the vaginal ring after the ring-free week?

- Insert the ring as soon as you remember. Use another method of birth control (such as condoms) for the next 7 days if having penis-vagina sex.

What if I miss my period?

- Pregnancy may be a possibility if having penis-vagina sex.
- Consider getting a pregnancy test. Pregnancy tests can be purchased at pharmacies, or done through your health care provider, at a community health centre, or a Teen Clinic (for youth 21 or younger).

Is the vaginal ring safe to use?

- Ask your health care provider if it is right for you. Tell them about any medical problems.
- If you smoke, especially if you are over 35, the vaginal ring may not be right for you.

Where can I get the vaginal ring?

You will need a prescription for the vaginal ring. 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

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.