

FACT SHEET: THE PATCH

Remember, the patch **does not protect you from Sexually Transmitted Infections or HIV.** If you are looking for protection from STIs and HIV, both the internal and external condoms are great options



HOW DOES THE PATCH WORK?

- The patch contains hormones (estrogen and a progestin), similar to the ones your body makes. While using the patch, it stops your ovaries from releasing eggs. Without an egg, you cannot get pregnant.
- No method of birth control is 100% effective. Seven in 100 people using the patch for a year get pregnant.

HOW DO I START THE PATCH?

- There are 2 ways to start the patch:
 - **Quick Start:** Put on your first patch as soon as you get the pack.
 - **Next period:** Put on your first patch soon after your next period begins.
- If you put on your first patch *up to 5 days after the start of your period*, you are protected against pregnancy **right away**.
- If you put on your first patch *more than 5 days after the start of your period*, you should **use condoms as back-up for the first 7 days**.

HOW DO I USE THE PATCH?

- The patch is like a sticker you wear on your skin for a week. You can wear the patch anywhere on your upper outer arm, belly, buttock, or back.
- Choose a spot on your body where you can see the patch if it falls off. Place the patch on a clean, dry area and make sure the edges stick well.
- You will use a new patch every week for 3 weeks and no patch for the 4th week.
- Most people get their period during the patch-free week. You may have a light period or no period at all.
- Start a new pack of patches at the end of the 4th week.

WHAT IF THE PATCH COMES OFF?

- If the patch comes off, put it back on right away. If it does not stick, use a new patch.
- If the patch falls off for more than a day, put on a new patch and use a back-up birth control method until you have had the patch on for 7 days straight. To do this, you may need to skip the “patch-free week.”
- Put on your next patch a week from the date of this new patch.

WHAT IF I FORGET TO CHANGE THE PATCH AFTER 7 DAYS?

- The patch has enough hormones for 9 days. If you leave the patch on for 9 days or less, just put on a new patch.
- If you leave the patch on for more than 9 days, put on a new patch and **use condoms for the next 7 days**.

WHAT IF I STOPPED USING THE PATCH AND HAD UNPROTECTED SEX?

- You can take Emergency Contraception (EC) **right away**. EC can prevent pregnancy up to 5 days after sex, and it works better the sooner you take it.

WHAT DO PEOPLE LIKE ABOUT THE PATCH?

- The patch is safe and effective birth control.
- Your periods may be more regular, lighter, and shorter.
- You may have clearer skin.
- The patch lowers your risk of getting cancer of the uterus and ovaries.
- Although some people who take testosterone prefer to avoid estrogen, the patch is safe to use.

HOW WILL THE PATCH AFFECT ME?

- You will feel about the same. During the first 2-3 months you may have nausea, bleeding between periods, and/or breast pain. These problems often go away after 2-3 months.
- After you stop using the patch, you can get pregnant right away.

WHERE CAN I GET THE PATCH?

- You can get the patch at pharmacies with a prescription. Some pharmacies can mail you the patch.

IS THE PATCH SAFE?

- The patch is very safe. Serious problems are rare. If you have any of the symptoms below, call your clinician:
 - Leg pain, swelling, and redness
 - Vision problems
 - Weakness or numbness on 1 side of your body
 - Chest pain
 - Bad headache
- Your clinician can help you find out if these symptoms are signs of a serious problem.
- People should not use the patch during the first 3-6 weeks after childbirth. Safer options include progestin-only and barrier methods.