

The Patch – Transdermal Contraception

How the patch works:

The birth control patch (Evra®) 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 method of birth control on a four week cycle. A new patch must be used each week for three weeks. 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 is replaced on the same day of the week for three weeks. The fourth week is patchfree. There should never be more than a seven-day patch-free time between patches. Follow the written instructions that come with the patch.

GENERAL REFERENCE: Contraceptive Technology: 18th Rev. Ed., 2004

Effectiveness:

About three women in 1,000 will get pregnant in one year if they use the patch correctly and don't forget to replace it on time (perfect use), though the risk may be higher for women

who weigh more than 200 pounds. If you forget to replace your patch once every seven days for three weeks, or forget to start a new cycle of patches after the fourth week (typical use), your

chance of getting pregnant goes up. The patch is a highly effective contraceptive, the same as other types of combined hormonal methods like the pill. You just need to remember that the cycle of use is three weeks on, one week off.

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. One advantage is you can see it, so you know it's working -- you don't have to worry about whether or not you remembered your pill.

Potential side effects and disadvantages:

Side effects of the patch may include slight nausea, breast tenderness and vaginal spotting and menstrual cramps, especially in the first two cycles. Some women have skin irritation under and

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

Potential risks:

Some women should not use the patch because of specific health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease. Ask your health provider about your 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.

Where can you get the patch?

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

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