

Birth Control Patches

Remember:

- Check your patch every day. Change the patch if:
 - › it is no longer sticky.
 - › it is stuck to itself or something else.
 - › it has other material stuck to it.
 - › it has fallen off.

For more information on sexual and reproductive health, visit:

- › www.sexandu.ca

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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Birth Control Patches

What are birth control patches (often called “the patch”)?

- Birth control patches have 2 hormones:
 - › Estrogen
 - › Progesterone
- They are used to prevent pregnancy.

How do birth control patches work?

- You put 1 patch on your skin every 7 days (1 week). The hormones are absorbed (taken in) through your skin.
- Birth control patches prevent pregnancy by:
 - › preventing an egg from leaving your ovary each month. This prevents fertilization (when an egg and sperm join).
 - › changing your uterus lining. This makes it harder for an egg to attach to the uterus wall.

How well do birth control patches work?

- Birth control patches are about 91% effective in preventing pregnancy for most people. They may be less effective for people who weigh more than 198 pounds (89.8 kg).

What are the possible side effects?

Most people do not have side effects.

Side effects may include:

- › Headache
- › Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- › Vomiting (throwing up)
- › Skin irritation
- › Mood changes
- › Less interest in sex
- › Weight gain or loss
- › Fluid retention (bloating)
- › Tiredness
- › Your breasts may get bigger or more tender. Breast tenderness is more common with the patch than with birth control pills. It usually lasts only 1 to 2 months.

Will birth control patches protect me from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

- Birth control patches do not protect you from STIs, like:
 - › Herpes
 - › Chlamydia
 - › Genital warts
 - › Gonorrhea
 - › HIV (the virus that causes AIDS)
- Use a condom every time you have sex to protect yourself from STIs.

What makes birth control patches less effective?

- Birth control patches may not be as effective for people who weigh more than 198 pounds.
- **Some medications can change how well birth control patches work.** Always check with your primary health care provider or your pharmacist before taking other medications while using birth control patches.
- **If you are taking a medication that may change how well your birth control patches work, use another method of birth control as a back-up, or wait to have sex until after you put on the first patch in the next package.**

What if I forget to put on or change a patch? What if a patch falls off?

- If you forget to put on or change a patch, or if a patch falls off, put on a new patch as soon as you can. Change the patch on the same day as usual.
 - › Use another method of birth control until you start a new package of patches.
- **Do not skip patches, even if you do not have sex very often. Never leave the patches off for more than 7 days in a row.**

When do birth control patches start working?

- Birth control patches start working after 7 days.
- **Use another method of birth control (like a condom and spermicide) or wait to have sex for 7 days after starting birth control patches.**

Pros of birth control patches:

- They are easy to use. You only need to put 1 patch on every 7 days.
- They may help to make your periods more regular.
- They may make period cramps less painful.
- Your period flow may be lighter.
- You can swim, shower, bathe, and exercise as usual.
- They may help to prevent and treat endometriosis (a condition where the uterus lining tissue grows outside of the uterus, causing pain).
- They may help to lower acne.

- They may lower your chance of getting:
 - › Ovarian cancer
 - › Endometrial (uterus lining) cancer
 - › Breast problems that are not cancer (like cysts)

Cons of birth control patches:

- You have to see a primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) to get a prescription.
- They may cost more than some other methods of birth control.
- **They must be used exactly as prescribed.** You must wear 1 patch every 7 days for 3 weeks in a row, followed by 7 days with no patch.
- They may cause you to:
 - › miss periods or have very little bleeding.
 - › have spotting or bleeding between periods.
- You may not be able to use birth control patches if they irritate your skin or cause an allergic reaction.
- It may take 6 months or longer to get pregnant after you stop using birth control patches. This is because they slow ovulation.

- › **Do not** write on the patch or change it in any way. This could affect the amount of medication that is absorbed by your skin and may raise your chance of getting pregnant.
9. Wear this patch for 7 days.
 10. After 7 days, take off the used patch and put on a new one right away. When taking off a used patch, lift 1 corner and quickly peel it back. Fold it in half so that it sticks to itself before throwing it in the garbage. Keep it out of reach of children and pets.
 - › If your skin is sticky, you can clean it by rubbing a bit of baby oil on the area. **Do not** clean the edges of the patch before removing it.
 - › To avoid irritation, **do not** put the new patch in the exact same place. It is OK to put the new patch near the old place.
 11. After 7 days, take off the 2nd patch and put on the 3rd one.
 12. After 7 days, take off the 3rd patch. **Do not** use a patch for the next 7 days.
 - › You should have your period during this week. Often, your period will start a day later than if you were on the pill.
 13. After 7 days, start the next group of patches by putting on a new patch. It does not matter when your period starts or ends.

To put on a birth control patch:

1. Make sure your skin is clean, dry, and free of makeup, lotions, creams, or powders that may keep the patch from sticking.
2. Avoid skin that is red, irritated, or cut.
3. Open 1 of the 3 foil pouches (they are all the same). It is important to remove the beige patch and the clear plastic liner covering the patch together from the pouch.
4. Avoid touching the sticky surface of the patch.
5. Peel away half of the clear plastic liner and put the sticky side of the patch on your clean, dry skin.
6. Peel away the other half of the clear plastic liner and press the rest of the patch onto your skin.
7. Press firmly on the patch with your hand for 10 seconds.
8. Rub around the edges of the patch with your finger to make sure all the edges are sticking well.
 - › **Do not** use tape, wraps, or any other adhesives or glues to hold the patch in place.

Who should not use birth control patches?

- **You should not use birth control patches if you:**
 - › are pregnant or think you may be pregnant.
 - › weigh more than 198 pounds.
 - › smoke and are 35 years old or older.
- You should also **not** use birth control patches if you have had:
 - › High blood pressure
 - › Blood clots
 - › Stroke
 - › Heart disease or coronary artery disease
 - › Breast cancer
 - › Cancer of the reproductive system (like the uterus or ovaries)
 - › Liver cancer, liver tumours, or liver disease

Smoking and birth control patches

- **Birth control patches are not prescribed for people who smoke and are 35 years old or older. This is because the risk of stroke and heart attack is too high.**
- If you smoke, we encourage you to stop. Smoking raises your risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and blood clots.

- Birth control patches are safe for people who do not smoke until menopause.

How do I use birth control patches?

- Put on 1 new patch every 7 days for 3 weeks.
Only use 1 patch at a time.
- **Do not** use a patch in the 4th week. You should have a period during this week.
- You can start using birth control patches at any time. You will change your patch on this day each week.
 - › For example, if you put on your first patch on a Sunday, you will put on the rest of your patches on Sundays.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

Where do I put the patch?

Put the patch in a place where it will **not** be rubbed by tight clothing. You can put it on your:

- › Upper back or shoulders
- › Abdomen (stomach area)
- › Upper arms
- › Buttocks(bum)

Never put the patch on your breasts.

