

## The Patch

### What is combined hormonal birth control?

Combined hormonal birth control uses two types of hormones to prevent pregnancy. They are called estrogen and progesterin. They work by:

- stopping the release of an egg (ovulation),
- thickening the cervical fluid to keep sperm from reaching the egg, and
- changing the lining of the uterus.



### What products are available?

There are three types of combined hormonal birth control:

- Pills (several brands)
- Skin patch (Evra™)
- Vaginal ring (Haloette™)

### How effective is the patch?

- The patch is 93% effective at preventing pregnancy when used correctly.
- Some medications including herbal supplements can interfere with hormonal birth control. Talk to your healthcare provider.

### Advantages

- Lighter and regular periods
- Less period cramping
- Sometimes helps with acne
- Protects from cysts in the breasts
- Lowers risk of ovarian and uterine cancers

### Disadvantages

- Have to remember to change the patch on the same day each week
- May be visible to others
- Unlike other birth control methods, the patch is not free with MSP
- Not indicated for women over 35 who smoke
- Does not protect from sexually transmitted infections
- Some users may experience mild side effects

### Side effects

Some people have side effects which usually go away a few weeks after starting the medication:

- Nausea
- Sore breasts
- Skin changes
- Spotting (bleeding between periods)
- Headaches
- Mood changes
- Skin rash

If you experience side effects and they bother you, go to a clinic or pharmacy to talk about other options **before** you stop using the patch.

### WARNING

#### Reasons to get urgent medical help:

- Frequent or very bad headaches
- Severe pain in your stomach
- Severe leg pain
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Sudden change in seeing or speaking clearly

Birth control is free for BC residents with MSP. For more information, check out the BC Pharmacare website.

### Where can you get the patch?

- The patch is available only with a prescription, which you can get from a sexual health clinic, pharmacy or from your health care provider.
- Unlike other birth control methods, the patch is not free when you have MSP. Cost is \$15-\$25 per month at a pharmacy.
- Some clinics sell the patch for less, such as Options for Sexual Health.
- Some youth clinics provide the patch for free.

### The birth control patch DOES NOT provide protection from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

STI testing is recommended every 6-12 months and/or when you have a new partner(s).  
STI testing is available at a sexual health clinic or with your health care provider.

## How do you use the patch?

### 3 weeks on - 1 week off

- Put the patch on right away (or on the first day of your next period).
- Note what day of the week you put your patch on - this is your “patch change day”.
- The patch is typically worn on the abdomen, upper body (not breasts), upper arm or buttock on clean, dry, lotion-free skin.
- Change the patch once a week for 3 weeks on your “patch change day”. Use a different area of the body to prevent skin irritation.

The patch is effective in preventing pregnancy after 7 days of use.  
**Use condoms as back-up for the first seven days.**

### Storing the patch:

Keep your patches out of really hot or really cold places.

- On the 4th week, do not wear a patch. This is your hormone-free week. You will get a period during this time.
- After the hormone-free week (no more than 7 days), put a new patch on and start the cycle again. Put a new patch on your normal “patch day” even if you are still having a period. Never go longer than 7 days without wearing a patch.

## What if you forget to change your patch or it comes off?

Pregnancy may occur if birth control is not used properly when sexually active.

### Are you more than 24 hours late changing your patch?

- **NO:** Put a new patch on right away, keep using your patch as normal. You are protected from pregnancy.
- **YES: You may not be protected from pregnancy.** Put a new patch on right away. Change your patch in one week on the new “patch change day”.
  - Use a back-up method of birth control (e.g. condoms) or do not have sex for 7 days.
  - Take the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) if you have had sex in the last 5 days.
  - An IUD can also be used as an option for Emergency Contraception up to 7 days after unprotected sex with effectiveness of 99%.
  - Call a sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE for more information.

### Your patch came off

- If the patch is partly off, press it firmly against the skin for 10 seconds. If it does not stick on its own, remove it and put on a new patch. Do not use other adhesives or tape to keep the patch in place.
- If the patch comes off all the way, try to put it back on if it is clean. Press it firmly for 10 seconds. If this does not work, put on a new patch right away.
- If you do not know how long the patch has been off, or it has been off for more than 24 hours, you may not be protected from pregnancy. See above.

Check out “*Stay on Schedule: Your guide to taking contraception after a missed or late dose*” at [www.sexandu.ca/sos/](http://www.sexandu.ca/sos/)

## Questions?

If you have questions about your birth control, do not stop taking it.

Call your health care provider, sexual health clinic, pharmacy, or 1-800-SEX-SENSE.

### Find the clinic closest to you:

<https://www.vch.ca/en/service/sexual-health-clinics>

[www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org)



This fact sheet contains general information and should not be used in place of individual consultation with a qualified healthcare provider.