



Patient & Family Guide  
2019

# Birth Control Patch

Aussi disponible en français :  
*Le timbre contraceptif (FF85-2026)*



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# **Birth Control Patch**

## **What is the birth control patch?**

The birth control patch is a patch that you place on your skin once a week. It has 2 hormones, estrogen and progesterone, which are absorbed (taken in) through the skin. It is used to prevent pregnancy.

## **How does the birth control patch (the patch) work?**

**The patch prevents pregnancy by:**

1. Preventing an egg from leaving your ovary so fertilization does not take place.
2. Changing the lining of your uterus so it cannot receive a fertilized egg.
3. Making the mucus in your cervix (opening of the uterus) thicker and harder for sperm to get through.

## **How well does the patch work?**

The patch is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy when used properly. It may not be as effective for women who weigh more than 198 pounds.

## **Pros of the patch:**

- It is easy to use – you only need to put it on once a week.
- Your periods may be more regular.
- It may make cramps during your period less painful.
- Your period flow may be lighter.
- It may lower the chance of getting some types of ovarian cysts or pelvic inflammatory disease (which can cause infertility).
- It may lower the risk of getting cancer of the ovary or endometrium (lining of the uterus).
- You may lower the risk of getting non-cancerous breast problems (such as cysts).
- It may help to decrease acne (pimples).
- It usually does not cause weight gain.
- It may help to prevent and treat endometriosis (a condition where the tissue lining the uterus grows outside of the uterus causing pain).

## Cons of the patch:

- You have to see a doctor or Registered Nurse (RN) to get a prescription.
- It may cost more than some other methods of birth control.
- It does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as herpes, chlamydia, genital warts, gonorrhea, or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).
- It must be used exactly as prescribed. You must wear one patch per week for 3 weeks in a row, followed by one week with no patch.
- It may cause missed periods, very little bleeding, spotting, or bleeding between periods.
- Most women have no side effects. It may cause side effects such as headaches, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting (throwing up), skin irritation, mood changes, depression, less interest in sex, increased breast size or tenderness, weight gain or loss, fluid retention (bloating), or tiredness.
- Breast tenderness is more common with the patch than the pill, but usually lasts only 1-2 months.
- It may take longer to get pregnant after you stop using the patch because it slows ovulation (egg being released from the ovary).

- Skin irritation/allergic reaction may prevent some women from using the patch.

**Stop using the patch and see your primary health care provider right away if you have more serious side effects, such as:**

- › migraine headaches
- › leg cramps
- › chest pain
- › high blood pressure
- › blood clot in the leg or lung

## **Who should not use the patch?**

**You should not use the patch if you have a history of the following conditions:**

- › blood clots
- › stroke
- › heart/coronary artery disease
- › breast cancer or cancer of the reproductive system (such as uterus or ovaries)
- › liver cancer, liver tumour, or known liver disease
- › high blood pressure
- › you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant

## **You should not use the patch if you:**

- › have major surgery scheduled in the next 4 weeks
- › weigh more than 198 pounds
- › smoke and are over 35

## **Smoking and the patch**

- The patch may be safely used by women until menopause if they are non-smokers.
- Women who smoke are encouraged to stop. Smoking increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and blood clots.
- The patch **WILL NOT** be prescribed for women who smoke and are over 35 because the risk of stroke and heart attack is too high.

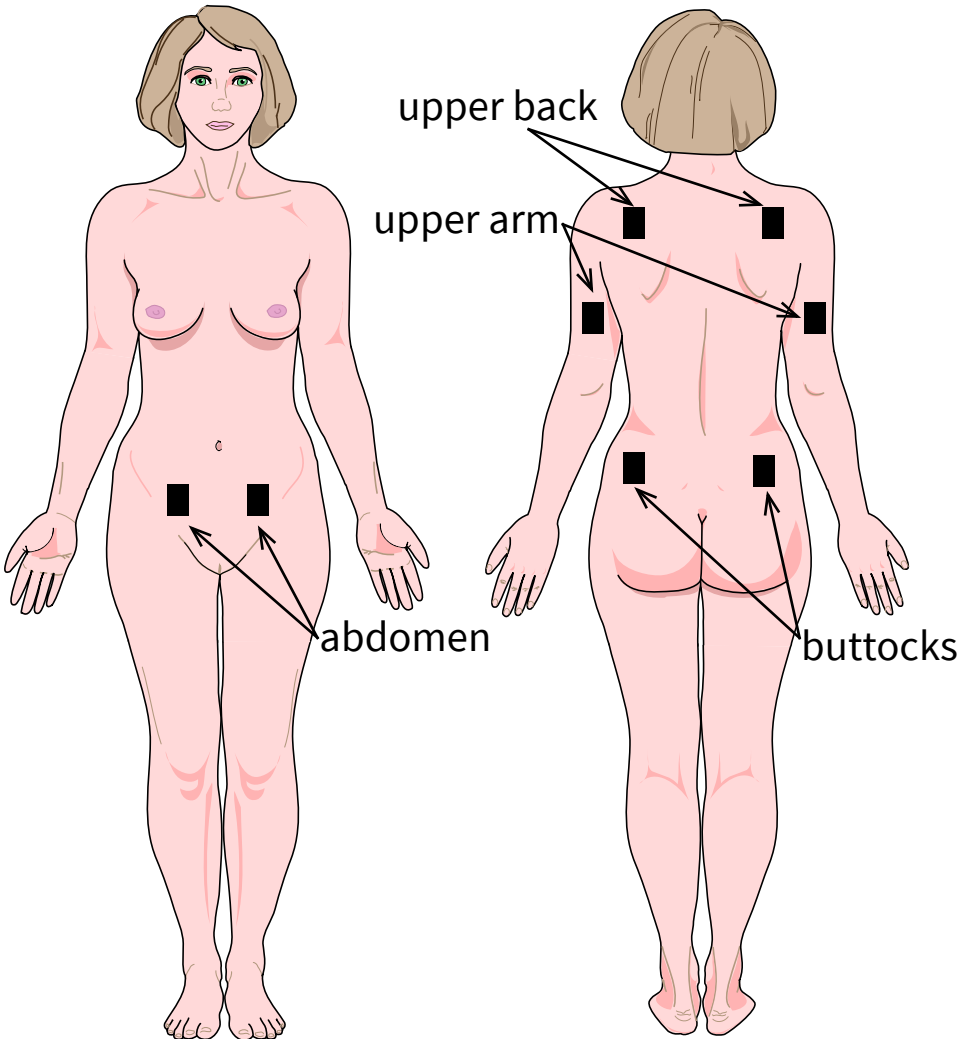
## How do I use the patch?

- Put on a new patch each week for 3 weeks. Only use one patch at a time. Do not use a patch in the 4<sup>th</sup> week. You should have a period during this week.
- You can start the patch on the first day of your period, on the first Sunday after your period starts, or right after an abortion. This day will be your “patch change day” for all the following patches. For example, if you apply your first patch on a Sunday, the remaining patches will all be applied on Sundays.
- When first starting the patch, it will take 7 days for your body to absorb the medication to prevent a pregnancy. **You must use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide), or wait to have sex for the next 7 days after starting the patch.**

## Where do I put the patch?

The patch can be placed on your buttock (bum), abdomen (stomach area), upper arm, or upper back (shoulder). Place the patch in a place where it will not be rubbed by tight clothing. **Never put the patch on your breasts.**

### Patch sites





1. Make sure your skin is clean, dry and free of makeup, lotions, creams, or powders that may prevent the patch from sticking.
2. Avoid skin that is red, irritated, or cut.
3. Open one 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 foil pouch.
4. Avoid touching the sticky surface of the patch.
5. Peel away half of the clear plastic liner and apply the sticky side of the patch to your skin that has been cleaned and dried.
6. Remove the other half of the clear plastic liner and press the remaining part of the patch onto your skin.
7. Press firmly on the patch with your hand for 10 seconds.
8. Rub around the edges several times with your finger to make sure all the edges are sticking well.
9. Wear this patch for 7 days.

10. On your “patch change day,” remove the used patch. Apply a new one immediately in the same way as the first patch. To avoid irritation, do not apply the new patch to the exact same place. You can apply the new one near the old place.
11. Seven days later, on “patch change day,” remove the second patch and apply the third one.
12. Remove the third patch on the next “patch change day.” 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. Start the next cycle of patches by applying a new patch on the usual “patch change day,” no matter when your period starts or ends.

### **What if I forget to start or change a patch?**

- If you forget during the 1<sup>st</sup> week, apply a new patch as soon as you remember. This day will now be your “patch change day.” **You must use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide), or wait to have sex for the next 7 days.**

- If it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> week, and it has been less than 48 hours, remove the current patch and put on a new one. Your “patch change day” will stay the same. No back-up birth control is needed.
- If it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> week, and it has been more than 48 hours, remove the current patch and put on a new one. This day will now be your “patch change day.” **You must use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide), or wait to have sex for the next 7 days.**
- If you forget to remove the patch during the 4<sup>th</sup> week, remove it as soon as you remember. You do not need to use back-up birth control and your “patch change day” will stay the same.

## **What should I do if the patch falls off, partly or completely?**

- Check your patch every day to make sure all the edges are sticking to your skin.
- If a patch has been off for less than 24 hours, try to reapply it and continue as usual. If the patch cannot be reapplied, put on a new one. The “patch change day” will stay the same.

- If a patch has been off for more than 24 hours, or you're not sure how long it's been off, stop this cycle. Apply a new patch. This day will now be your "patch change day". **You must use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide), or wait to have sex for the next 7 days.**

## **Will the patch protect me from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?**

The patch will **not** protect you from sexually transmitted infections such as herpes, chlamydia, genital warts, gonorrhea, or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

**Use a condom every time you have sex to protect yourself from STIs.**

## **Remember:**

- Check your patch every day. Change the patch if it is no longer sticky, is stuck to itself or something else, has other material stuck to it, or has fallen off before.
- When removing a used patch, lift one 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.**

- Never leave the patch off for more than 7 days in a row. Do not skip patches, even if you do not have sex very often.
- After removing a patch, if a small ring of adhesive (stickiness) is left on your skin, you can remove it by rubbing a little baby oil on the area. Do not clean the edges of the patch before removing it on “patch change day”.
- Only wear 1 patch at a time.
- If you are switching from the pill to the patch, you should start the patch on the first day of your period. No back-up birth control is needed. **If the patch is not applied within the first 24 hours of your period, use a back-up method of birth control (such as a condom and spermicide), or wait to have sex for 7 days after starting the patch.**
- Do not use tape, wraps, or any other adhesives/glues to hold the patch in place.
- 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 increase your chance of getting pregnant.
- You can swim, shower, bathe, and exercise as usual.

## **What makes the patch less effective?**

The patch may not be as effective for women who weigh more than 198 pounds.

### **These medications may interfere (change) with the patch:**

- › anticonvulsants (drugs for epilepsy)
- › certain medications used to treat HIV or AIDS
- › antibiotics (drugs for infections)
- Always check with your primary health care provider or pharmacist before taking other medications while on the patch. If a medication may change how the patch works, use a condom and spermicide with the patch, or wait to have sex until you apply the first patch of the next cycle.

**We recommend that you see your primary health care provider once a year for a breast exam, pelvic exam, and Pap smear.**

