

The Contraceptive Patch

What is the contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch (Ortho Evra™ transdermal system) is a weekly hormonal birth control method that you place on your skin like a large Band-Aid®. It is a thin, smooth, beige square that is about the size of a matchbook. The patch contains hormones that are released through the skin and into the bloodstream.

How does it work?

The contraceptive patch works very much like birth control pills. It contains the same hormones (estrogen and progestin) found in commonly used birth control pills and releases these hormones at the same daily rate as the pill. When you place the patch on your skin, the hormones are absorbed through your skin and enter your bloodstream. Wearing the patch keeps a woman from ovulating, which means she does not release an egg that could be fertilized by a man's sperm. The patch also thickens a woman's cervical mucus, which makes it harder for sperm to enter the womb.

Are there any risks for using it?

Users of the contraceptive patch are exposed to more total estrogen in their blood than if they were taking a typical birth control pill containing 35 micrograms of estrogen. However, the highest blood level of estrogen (peak blood levels) is lower with the patch than with typical birth control pills. In general, increased estrogen exposure may increase the risk of blood clots. However, it is not known if women using the patch are at a greater risk of experiencing these side effects.

How effective is it?

When used correctly, the patch is 99% effective. It may be less effective in women weighing more than 198 pounds. The patch begins to work right away, although a woman should use another birth control method (like a condom) during the first week. This is not necessary if she starts using the patch within 24 hours of her menstrual period.

How is it used?

The patch is used on a weekly 28-day cycle, similar to birth control pills. Each box contains three patches. A patch is worn for a 7-day period, then removed and replaced with a new patch. Every new patch should be applied on the same day of the week. After using three patches in a row, no patch is worn during the fourth week. This "hormone-free" week allows a woman to get her menstrual period. After the patch-free week, the woman begins using a new box of patches. (For more detailed instructions, speak with your clinician and refer to the package insert.)

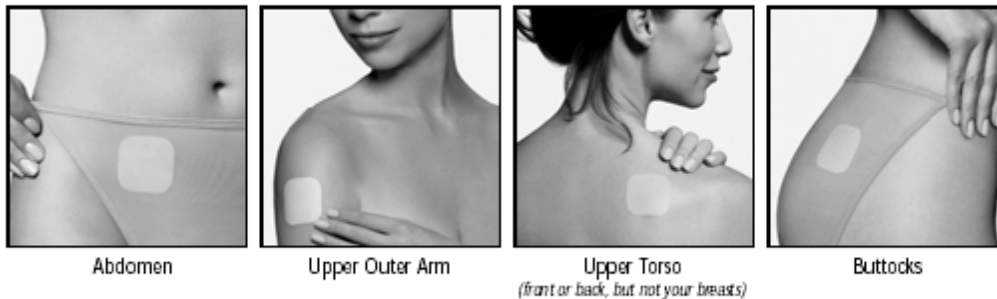
How the Patch Is Used

	Month						
1st Patch →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2nd Patch →	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
3rd Patch →	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
No Patch →	22	23	24	25	26	27	28

*Each patch is worn for a 7-day period.
After using three patches in a row,
no patch is worn during the fourth week.*

Wearing the Patch

The contraceptive patch can be worn on four places on your body.



Source: Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceutical, 2001.

Where can a woman wear the patch?

The patch can be applied to four areas of the body (see Figure): (1) abdomen; (2) upper outer arm; (3) upper torso (front or back, but not on the breasts); and (4) buttocks. When replacing an old patch with a new one, the woman should not stick the new patch to the same place on the skin. This is to help prevent skin irritation or rash.

Will the patch fall off if I swim, bathe, or sweat?

Probably not. The adhesive is designed to stay put even when under water. In clinical studies, only a small number of patches (5%) became partially or fully detached. A woman should be careful not to apply creams or oils (such as suntan lotion) under or near the patch, as this can make it more likely to fall off.

What happens if a patch becomes loose or falls off?

First, the woman should try to reattach it. If the detached patch is no longer sticky, the woman should replace it with a new patch. This new patch should be worn until the next "patch change day," then replaced. If the patch was off the skin for more than 24 hours, however, the woman should begin a new cycle of patches and may need to use another form of contraception (such as a condom) for the first week of this new cycle. (For more detailed instructions, speak with your clinician and refer to the package insert.)

What are the side effects?

The side effects of the patch are similar to those for birth control pills. During the first cycle of use, about one in five women may experience spotting or breakthrough bleeding between menstrual periods. This effect decreases after the first several cycles. Other side effects reported by women in clinical studies included headache, nausea, application site reactions (rash or irritation), and breast discomfort.

How do I know if the patch is right for me?

The patch is an effective contraceptive that can be used safely by most women. The patch does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or HIV. Women at risk of STDs should also use a female condom or male latex condom to prevent disease. Your clinician can give you more information and help you decide if the patch is right for you.

You should not use the patch if you:

- are 35 or older and smoke cigarettes
- have certain inherited blood clotting disorders
- have certain vascular conditions associated with diabetes mellitus
- have controlled high blood pressure and smoke cigarettes
- have had blood clots or vein inflammation
- have had an abnormal growth or cancer of the breast
- have had a heart attack or stroke
- have had migraine headaches with aura
- have had serious heart valve problems
- have a severe liver disease or have had growths on the liver
- have uncontrolled high blood pressure
- need prolonged bed rest after major surgery
- think you might be pregnant

WARNING SIGNS Report any of these signs to your clinician as soon as possible:

- eye problems such as blurred or double vision
- pain in the abdomen, chest, or arm
- severe headaches
- sudden shortness of breath or spitting up blood
- unusual swelling or pain in the leg
- worsening depression
- yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice)
- a new lump in your breast
- unusual heavy bleeding from your vagina
- no period after having a period every month

What if I decide to stop using the patch?

You may stop using the patch at any time. You should use another method of birth control if you do not want to become pregnant. Call the clinic if you want to discuss and/or receive another method of birth control. If you wish to become pregnant, there may be some delay in becoming pregnant.

Remember...regular exams for routine healthcare including screenings for sexually transmitted diseases and cancer are strongly recommended!

Questions??

If you have questions about side effects, or if you are unsure about using the patch-call the clinic right away!
