



# Facts About The **CONTRACEPTIVE PATCH** (“THE PATCH”)

## Will I have problems if I use the patch?

- ▲ The side effects of the patch are similar to those of the birth control pill and vaginal ring.
- ▲ Most common reported side effects include: headache, nausea, breast tenderness, and irritation on the skin where the patch is located.
- ▲ Most women do NOT have these problems, but VERY RARELY the patch could cause: blood clots, heart attacks and stroke.

## Is there anyone who should not use the patch?

Most women can use the patch without having any problems. You should not use the patch if any of the following apply to you:

- ▲ 35 years or older and smoke, which increases the risk of heart attack and stroke
- ▲ Pregnant or suspected pregnancy
- ▲ Blood clots in your legs or lungs – now or in the past
- ▲ Chest pain, heart attack or stroke, diseases of the heart valves with complications
- ▲ High blood pressure
- ▲ Diabetes with complications of the kidneys, eyes, nerves or blood vessels; or more than 20 years having diabetes
- ▲ Headaches with neurological symptoms (migraines with aura)
- ▲ Current breast cancer
- ▲ Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, liver tumors or active liver disease
- ▲ Less than 21 days after having a baby
- ▲ Long period of bed rest following major surgery

## What is a contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch is a weekly hormonal birth control method that is worn on the skin to prevent pregnancy.

## How does the patch work?

The patch works by releasing female hormones into your body. These hormones keep your body from releasing an egg that could be fertilized by a man's sperm. The hormones also keep the man's sperm from reaching the woman's uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes, and make it hard for an egg to stick inside the uterus.

## How well does the patch work?

Most women will NOT become pregnant if they use their patch correctly. If you gave 100 females the patch, only 9 of them would become pregnant the first year. Women who do not change their patch on schedule get pregnant more often than women who use their patch correctly. Some studies say that the patch does not work as well if you weigh more than 198 pounds. Talk with your doctor – you can usually use the patch no matter how much you weigh.

## Why is the patch a good choice for me?

- ▲ The patch is easy to use. You only have to think about birth control once a week.
- ▲ When you use it correctly, it works very well.
- ▲ The patch often makes your periods shorter, lighter and more regular.
- ▲ Since the patch works like the pill, women who use the patch may have less chance of getting cancer of the ovaries or of the uterus than women who do not use birth control.

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# Facts About The CONTRACEPTIVE PATCH (“THE PATCH”), cont.

## How do you use the patch?

- ▲ Choose one of the following ways to start using the patch:
  1. You can start using the patch on the first day of your period. The patch will be effective immediately and you do not need to use back-up birth control.  
or
  2. If you do not begin using the patch on the first day of your period, you will need to use a non-hormonal back-up method for one full week. Never begin using the patch if there is any chance of pregnancy.
- ▲ Place one patch on your buttock, abdomen, upper outer arm or upper torso, in a place where it won't be rubbed by tight clothing. Do not put the patch on your breasts.
- ▲ Only wear one patch each week. Change your patch on the same day of each week. This day is known as the “Patch Change Day.” For example, if the first patch is applied on a Monday, you should always replace it on a Monday.
- ▲ A new patch is applied every week for three weeks. It is best if you do not apply a new patch to the same spot but switch to another part of the body.
- ▲ You will not wear a patch during week four and you should expect your period during this time.

### Example Cycle:

Week One – Apply one new patch

Week Two – Remove old patch and apply new patch.

Week Three – Remove old patch and apply new patch.

Week Four – Remove old patch and your period should start this week.

- ▲ Remember: Every new patch should be applied on the same day of the week for three weeks.
- ▲ Do not wear make-up, creams, lotions, powders or other topical products where the patch is or will be placed.

## How do I know if the patch causes any problems?

If you have any of these warning signs, call your doctor, nurse or health department clinic right away:

- ▲ Sharp chest pain and/or coughing up blood (possible clot in the lung)
- ▲ Pain in the calf (back of lower leg)
- ▲ Crushing chest pain or heaviness
- ▲ Sudden severe headache, change in vision or speech, weakness in one side (possible stroke)
- ▲ Missed menstrual period or irregular vaginal bleeding

## Can I breastfeed my baby while using the patch?

Yes, breastfeeding with the patch is safe for you and your baby. It is best to wait until four weeks after you start breastfeeding to start using the patch.

## Where can I get the patch?

You can get the patch at the health department, a family planning clinic or a doctor's office.

## REMEMBER:

Using the Patch will not keep you from getting HIV or any other disease you can get when you have sex. To protect yourself, use a latex or polyurethane condom each time you have sex.

### References:

Contraceptive Technology 20<sup>th</sup> ed., (2011)

U.S. Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use (2012)

U.S. Selected Practice Recommendations for Contraceptive Use (2013)



State of North Carolina • Pat McCrory, Governor

Department of Health and Human Services • Richard O. Brajer, Secretary

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