

Birth Control Patch

What is the birth control patch (the patch)?

The birth control patch is a thin, light brown patch that's worn on the skin. The sticky part contains hormones (estrogen and progestin) that are like natural hormones. The hormones are absorbed through the skin and stop the ovaries from releasing an egg. You can't get pregnant if you don't release an egg.



How well does the birth control patch work?

- With **typical use** (not following the exact directions) the patch is **91%** effective.
- With **perfect use** (following the exact directions all the time) the patch is **99.7%** effective.
- Most pregnancies happen because people don't use their patches as directed.
- The patch may be less effective at preventing pregnancy if you weigh more than 90 kg (198 lbs.).
- The patch doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV.

How do I start using the patch?

You need a prescription from your health care provider for the patch. Many sexual health clinics offer some types of birth control for free or low cost for people who qualify.

If you start the patch on:

- day 1 of your period, it works right away to prevent pregnancy.
- on any other day, use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex for 7 days.

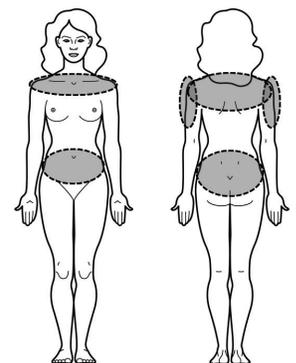
How do I use the patch?

Put the patch on clean, dry skin on your upper buttocks, upper outer arm, abdomen, or upper body. Put each new patch in a different place (e.g., change between right and left sides) to keep your skin from getting irritated.

Press down firmly on the patch with the palm of your hand for 10 seconds to make sure the edges stick well. Check that your patch is secure every day.

When using the patch, **don't**:

- put the patch on your chest/breasts.
- use bandages or tape to hold the patch in place.
- put the patch on skin that's red, cut, or scratched.
- use bath oil, body wash, lotion, or powder on the area where you will put your new patch.



Only use one patch at a time and:

- leave the patch on during activities (e.g., exercise, shower, swim).
- if it's not sticking or your skin is irritated, try to put it on again in a different place. If it won't stick, take it off and put a new patch on right away. If you need a replacement patch, talk to your pharmacist or health care provider.
- throw used patches in a garbage away from children and pets because they still contain hormones.
- store patches at room temperature.

What are the benefits of the patch?

- Your period may be more regular, lighter, and/or shorter with less cramping.
- The patch may lower your risk of ovarian and endometrial cancer.
- The patch may help with acne and painful periods (dysmenorrhea).
- It's safe to use the patch for many years. There's no need to "take a break" from using it.
- You can get pregnant as soon as you stop using the patch.

What are the side effects of the patch?

There is a chance (more likely in the first 3 months) that you might have:

- headaches
- upset stomach (nausea)
- spotting or bleeding between periods
- breast/chest discomfort
- mood changes
- changes in your period (heavier or lighter)
- bloating
- irritated skin where the patch is applied
- weight changes

If you have side effects, don't stop using the patch. Talk to your health care provider. Most side effects get better within 3 months.

Can the patch cause blood clots?

When using the patch, there's a small risk of blood clots in the legs, lungs, heart, and/or the head. The risk is higher depending on:

- age
- weight
- history (or family history) of blood clots, heart attack, or stroke
- history of smoking or vaping nicotine (especially people older than 35 who smoke)
- if you are less than 21 days postpartum
- history of migraines with aura or other nervous system problems affecting speech, vision, movement, or sensations
- risk factors for heart disease (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol)
- history of other medical problems (ask your health care provider about this)

The risk of getting a blood clot with the patch may be higher than with the birth control pill. The risk of getting a blood clot is higher during pregnancy and right after having a baby than when using the patch.

If you get a fever or are exposed to heat (e.g., sauna, hot tub) with the patch on, you may get more estrogen. This may increase your risk of getting a blood clot.

Blood clots are very serious. Go to the nearest emergency department or call 911 if you have:

- trouble breathing and/or it hurts to breathe
- a very bad headache
- very bad pain in your chest, abdomen, or legs
- eye problems (e.g., sudden blurry vision or loss of vision)
- one leg is swollen
- sudden numbness in the face, arms, or legs (often only on one side of the body)
- sudden confusion or trouble understanding what people say to you

When do I change the patch?

Your patch change day is the day of the week that you put your patch on. Always put on a new patch on the same day of the week, at the same time.

You wear a patch for 1 week at a time and then remove it. A new patch is put on each week for 3 weeks in a row. You don't put a patch on during week 4 (birth control hormone-free days). This is when you'll get your period. Never leave the patch off for more than 7 days in a row.

CALENDAR						
✓						
✓						
✓						
✗						
✓						

After your 7 days without a patch, start a new package of patches and:

- put on the first patch on the same patch change day
- put the patch on even if you still have your period - it should stop in a few days
- put the patch on even if you haven't had a period and contact your health care provider. Consider doing a pregnancy test if you've had vaginal sex without a condom since your last period.

What if the patch fell off, I forgot to put it on, or I forgot to change it?

If you need help deciding what to do, talk to your health care provider, read the chart below, or go to sexandu.ca, click on contraception, and look for *Stay On Schedule*. There are also apps you can use on your phone to help you remember to change your patch.

If it's **less than 24 hours** since the patch came off, try to put the same patch back on. If you can't, put on a new one right away. Your patch change day stays the same and you're still protected from pregnancy.

If it's been **more than 24 hours**, follow the directions depending on what week you're on:

Week 1	Week 2 or 3	
Started more than 24 hours late <i>OR</i> Patch off more than 24 hours	Patch off 24 to 72 hours	Patch off 72 hours or longer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put on a new patch right away. This cycle will have 3 patches. Your patch change day stays the same. Use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex for 7 days. Get emergency contraception as soon as possible if your extra method of birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks) or you've had vaginal sex without a condom in the last 5 days. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put on a new patch right away. Finish this cycle of patches and then start a new cycle of 3 patches. Don't take the hormone-free break. Your patch change day stays the same. You might have spotting or miss your period this month. Don't take off your patch. You're still protected from pregnancy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put on a new patch right away. Finish this cycle of patches and then start a new cycle of 3 patches. Don't take the hormone-free break. Your patch change day stays the same. You might have spotting or miss your period this month. Don't take off your patch. Use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex for 7 days. Get emergency contraception as soon as possible if your extra method of birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks) or you've had vaginal sex without a condom in the last 5 days.

Did You Know

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There's an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year, if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a condom/barrier every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.
- You can lower your risk of HIV by taking an HIV prevention pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit www.prepalberta.ca to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can help prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyorNotAlberta.ca
- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.



Scan for more information