



Vaginal Ring



Health Services Department, Public Health
Infectious Diseases Control Division

NuvaRing®

What is the vaginal ring?

The vaginal ring is a hormonal method of birth control. It is made of soft, flexible, clear plastic. The ring is inserted into a woman's vagina where it slowly releases hormones for three weeks to prevent pregnancy.

How does the vaginal ring work?

The ring contains two hormones (estrogen and progestin), which are similar to a woman's natural hormones. These hormones are slowly released from the ring and are absorbed through the wall of the vagina into the bloodstream.

They prevent pregnancy in three ways:

- by stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg
- by making the mucus produced by the cervix thicker, to prevent the sperm from reaching the egg
- by making the uterine lining thin

How effective is the vaginal ring?

Of 100 women who use the ring for one year according to instructions, approximately one to two women will get pregnant.

Prescription medications (e.g. some antibiotics or anticonvulsants) may decrease the effectiveness of the ring. Check with your pharmacist to see if any medication that you are taking affects the ring.

Advantages of the vaginal ring

- it is 98 to 99 percent effective against pregnancy if used properly
- it may decrease menstrual cramps
- periods may be lighter, shorter, and more regular
- acne may improve
- it may reduce the risk of cancer of the uterus and ovaries

Disadvantages

- in the first 3 months, you may experience spotting or bleeding between periods, headaches, breast tenderness, increased vaginal discharge or irritation, and nausea
- you or your partner may be able to feel the ring. (It is ok to take the ring out during intercourse as long as it is not out for longer than 3 hours)
- the ring may slip out when removing a tampon, having a bowel movement or straining
- the ring does not protect you against STIs including HIV/AIDS. You should use latex condoms in combination with the ring to protect against STIs

Disadvantages (continued)

- a health care provider has to give you a prescription
- there is **a risk of blood clots**. In very rare cases, women using hormonal contraceptives including the NuvaRing™ may develop a blood clot. Your risk is higher if you smoke, if you have a family history of blood clots, or if you have ever had blood clot, heart attack or stroke. See your doctor immediately or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if you have any of these symptoms:
 - severe abdominal pain
 - severe chest pain, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing
 - severe headache or numbness in arms and legs
 - eye problems such as vision loss or blurred vision
 - speech problems such as slurring
 - severe leg pain in the calf or thigh

How do you use the vaginal ring?

When **using the ring for the first time**, count the first day you start bleeding as day one of your period.

1. Insert the ring into your vagina sometime during the first to the fifth day of this period, even if you have not finished bleeding.
 - choose the position that is most comfortable for you (lying down, squatting, sitting on the toilet or standing with one foot resting on a higher surface, such as a stool, bed, chair or bathtub)
 - pinch the ring between your thumb and index finger until it becomes long and narrow
 - gently push the folded ring into your vagina with your fingers. The exact position of the ring in the vagina is not important for it to work for you. (For more detailed instruction, see the information pamphlet that has come with your NuvaRing or go to www.sexualityandu.ca to see how to insert the vaginal ring).
 - **during this first cycle**, you must **use condoms and/or spermicide as your back up method of birth control for the first 7 days** of NuvaRing use.
2. Leave the ring in the vagina for 3 weeks (21 days).
3. After 3 weeks, remove the ring by hooking your finger under the rim and pulling the ring down and out. Dispose of it in the garbage. Do not flush down the toilet.
4. Your period should start during this ring-free week.
5. At the end of the ring-free week (7 days), insert another ring to begin a new cycle. The day you insert a new ring should always be the same (e.g. Insert the ring on a Monday, leave in place for 21 days, out for 7 days and a new ring put in on that Monday).

Important Things to Know

- store at room temperature
- do not store in direct sunlight or at temperature higher than 30°C
- do not use NuvaRing past the expiry date on the package; the date should not exceed 4 months from the date of dispensing or the expiration date, whichever comes first
- keep out of reach of children or pets

Your period

- your period may be more regular, lighter, and shorter with less cramping
- a tampon can be used at the same time as the ring if you have any spotting or bleeding



Important Things to Know (continued)

If the ring slips out

If the ring slips out rinse it with cool to luke-warm water and reinsert immediately. You are still protected from pregnancy unless the ring has been out for longer than 3 hours. If the ring is out for longer than 3 hours, you may not be adequately protected from pregnancy. Reinsert the ring as soon as you remember and use an extra method of birth control for 7 days. Read your NuvaRing pamphlet, call your sexual health clinic directly or call Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 for further instructions.

If you forget to insert the ring

If you forget to insert the ring after the 7 day break, insert it as soon as you remember and use an extra form of birth control (e.g. condoms) for 7 days. If you have had unprotected sex during this time or the extra form of birth control fails (e.g. condom breaks) contact your birth control clinic or health-care provider as you may want to consider emergency contraception, which can prevent pregnancy.

If you forget to remove the ring

- If the ring has been left in your vagina for an extra week or less (up to 4 weeks in total), remove it and insert a new ring after a 1-week, ring-free break.
- If the ring has been left in your vagina for more than 4 weeks in total, there is a possibility that you could become pregnant – so it's important to use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms or spermicide), until the new ring has been in place for 7 days in a row.

