



the Contraceptive Patch



Community and Health
Services Department

What is the contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch is worn on the skin to prevent pregnancy. It contains estrogen and progestin, the hormones normally found in a woman's body. It works on a 28-day (four week) cycle. Each patch is worn for one week at a time and is replaced on the same day of the week for three consecutive weeks. On the fourth week no patch is worn.

How does the contraceptive patch work?

It works the same way as the birth control pill:

- it stops your ovaries from releasing an egg each month
- it makes the mucus in the cervix thicker thus making it harder for the sperm to travel into the cervix (the opening to the uterus)
- the lining of the uterus becomes thinner, making it harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus.

How effective is the contraceptive patch?

The contraceptive patch is 99 percent effective with perfect use. In other words, of 100 women who use the patch according to instructions, approximately one woman will get pregnant in one year.

How do you use the contraceptive patch?

- apply the first patch during the first 24 hours of your menstrual period. This will be your patch change day. Then you apply a new patch on the same day of the week for the next two weeks. For example, if your period starts on a Sunday, apply the first patch on a Sunday. All the other patches should also be applied on a Sunday
- on the fourth week do not apply a patch. Your period should start during this patch-free week
- remember, you should only wear one patch at a time. Read the instructions that come with the contraceptive patch and check the expiry date on the package before you use them

Note: If you are late in applying your patch, read your instruction booklet or call York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 for instructions.

The contraceptive patch may not work as effectively if you are taking certain medications such as antibiotics or seizure medication. (There may be others - always check with the pharmacist). You should use an additional method of birth control (such as condoms) during these times and for one week after you finish your medication.

What are the advantages and disadvantages?

Advantages

- 99 percent effective against pregnancy
- decreased menstrual cramps
- lighter, shorter, more regular periods
- improvement in acne
- reduced risk of cysts of ovaries and benign breast disease
- decreased risk of cancer of the uterus and ovaries

Disadvantages

- break-through bleeding or spotting between periods
- headaches
- slight weight loss or gain
- breast tenderness
- nausea
- less effective in women greater than 90 kg or 198 lbs

A very small number of women may experience serious problems such as a blood clot. You have an increased risk of these problems if you are a smoker or have high blood pressure, or are over 40 years of age.

Early warning signs

- abdominal pain (severe)
- chest pain (severe), shortness of breath
- headaches (severe), dizziness, weakness, numbness
- eye problems (vision loss or blurring), speech problems
- severe leg pain (calf or thigh)

If you experience any of the above call a doctor **immediately** or go to the nearest **hospital emergency department** and tell them you are using the contraceptive patch.

The contraceptive patch does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Use condoms every time you have sex.

