

Contraceptive Vaginal Ring Fact Sheet

The **Contraceptive Vaginal Ring** (the ring) is placed in the vagina and left there for three weeks, and then removed for one week to allow a period (menses). It may also be placed in the vagina and changed on the same day each calendar month (e.g., the 1st of every month) without ever having a ring-free week. The ring provides similar medication (hormones) to the oral contraceptive pill (the Pill). These two hormones, an estrogen and a progestin, are similar to hormones that are naturally made in a woman's body. The ring does not need to be fitted; it will work as long as it is in touch with the vaginal walls. The ring prevents pregnancy by preventing the egg from being released from the ovary, and also by thickening the cervical mucus to prevent sperm from reaching an egg.

If used correctly, the ring is 99% effective at preventing pregnancy. However, most women do not use the ring perfectly. For the typical woman who uses the ring, it is 91% effective at preventing pregnancy (9 pregnancies in 100 women using the ring for a year). For young women, the ring may only be 80% effective.

The ring does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms are the best way for sexually active people to reduce the risk of infection. Always use a condom if you or your partner has other sex partners or if you are otherwise at risk for STI.

Advantages of the ring:

- No need to do something daily or right before sex to prevent pregnancy
- Decreased pain with periods and/or lighter menstrual periods
- May improve PMS (premenstrual syndrome) symptoms
- Can decrease risk of uterine (endometrial), ovarian, and other cancers
- Ability to become pregnant returns quickly when you stop taking using the ring.

Disadvantages of the ring:

- Must be used correctly – three weeks in place and one week out, or changed the same calendar day each month
- Much less effective (higher risk of pregnancy) if the ring is not used properly
- Side effects – The ring is generally well-tolerated, but some women experience side effects such as breast tenderness, nausea, or change in mood or libido. Most of these symptoms improve with time.
- The ring may interact with certain epilepsy (anti-seizure), anti-retroviral, or other medications.

Risks of using the ring:

- **Venous thromboembolism** – Very rarely, a blood clot can develop in the veins of the legs (DVT) or in the lungs (PE). These conditions can be life-threatening. Use of the ring may increase the chance of developing a DVT or PE slightly. The risk of having a DVT or PE while using the ring is approximately 1 in 5,000-10,000 women. This is lower than the risk of DVT or PE in pregnancy.
- **Stroke or heart attack** – Very rarely, young women can have a stroke or heart attack. Use of the ring can increase the chance of this happening slightly, especially if you also have other risk factors (such as high blood pressure, smoking or a certain type of migraine headaches).
- **High blood pressure** – The ring can slightly increase your blood pressure. For most women, this increase is small and does not affect your health.

Contraindications – The ring is generally not recommended for women who:

- Smoke (or use other tobacco products) and are older than 35
- Have uncontrolled high blood pressure (hypertension)

- Have certain types of migraine headaches
- Have a history of blood clot (DVT or PE) or certain blood disorders which can increase the risk for blood clots (personally or in a close family member)
- Have a history of recent breast cancer
- Have a history of stroke or heart disease
- Have severe diabetes (or complications from diabetes)
- Have recently given birth (within 6 weeks).

Tell your clinician if you have any of these risk factors or conditions.

Warning signs – Call your healthcare provider right away if you:

- Think you are pregnant
- Have unusual pain or swelling in the legs, unusual pain in your chest, or difficulty breathing (go directly to an emergency room)
- Have sudden change in vision, severe headache, weakness, numbness or difficulty speaking (go directly to an emergency room)
- Have new or worsening headaches
- Have symptoms you think might be related to using the ring

Problem-solving during use:

- If the same ring has been in the vagina for longer than 35 days or there has been no ring in the vagina for longer than 9 days, you are at risk for pregnancy. You should place a new ring in the vagina as soon as possible and use a back-up birth control method for the next 7 days (wait to have sex or use condoms). If you had sex during this time you should take emergency contraceptive pills (Plan B® or Ella®) as soon as possible and call your clinician's office.
- You should keep the ring in the vagina during sex. If it falls out, or if you take it out during sex, after 3 hours you may be at risk for pregnancy. You should place the ring back in the vagina as soon as possible and use a back-up birth control method for the next 7 days. You can wash the ring off with water before putting it back in the vagina. If you lose the ring, you can place a new ring in the vagina.
- Rings should be refrigerated and you should avoid storing them in very hot or very cold temperatures.

Regular visits for routine health care, STI and cancer screening are strongly recommended.

All of my questions about the ring have been answered and I desire to start using the ring as my form of birth control. I understand that I should use a back-up method (abstinence or condoms) to prevent pregnancy for 7 days after starting the ring unless otherwise directed by my clinician.