



Read about more birth control methods that could be right for you in the June Print Issue.

Smart Mum's Guide to Birth Control PART II

Need more of your questions on birth control answered? Get the scoop on birth control patches and vagina rings right here!

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Birth control is an essential component when it comes to family planning. Knowing more about the different types and usage of birth control can help prevent an unwanted pregnancy. With the advancements in medical science, new methods of birth control have been made available to both men and women. These new birth control methods are safe and effective,

allowing parents to be in control of when they would like to try for a baby. This will ensure that the parents are ready to welcome a brand new bub into their lives. Thus, it is important to find the method that is the best for yourself. Educating yourself is the first step to making your decision. Besides birth control pills and intra-uterine devices, birth control patches and vagina rings are also popular birth control methods.

The Birth Control Patch What is a Birth Control Patch?

A birth control patch is a thin, beige square patch slightly smaller than 2 inches in width that sticks to the skin. It works by releasing hormones which are absorbed through the skin and into the bloodstream. These hormones prevent pregnancy. Dr Kelly Loi, obstetrician and gynaecologist (fertility and IVF specialist) at Mount Elizabeth hospital explains,

"The combination of the progesterone and oestrogen hormones in the patch prevents ovulation – the release of an egg from the ovaries during the monthly menstrual cycle. Without the egg, fertilisation is unable to take place. The hormones also cause the mucus in the cervix to thicken, making it difficult for the sperm to enter the uterus and reach any eggs that may have been released." In addition, the hormones can also change the uterus lining, making it tough for the egg to attach to the wall of the uterus.

How effective is it?

Dr Loi says, "If you use it perfectly, the patch has a low failure rate of 0.3 per cent. However, for girls who weigh more than 90 kilograms, the patch may be less effective."

Where and how long should I wear the Birth Control Patch?

The patch can be worn on four areas – the abdomen, buttocks, upper arm or upper torso. It must not be worn over the breasts. The birth control patch is based on your monthly menstrual cycle. Dr Loi instructs, "The patch should be applied on the first day of the menstrual cycle. You will then have to change it once a week for 3 weeks in a row."

You can get your doctor to give you a more detailed explanation regarding the changing of the patch. You will get your period during the patch free-week.

What are the risks of the Birth Control Patch?

Dr Loi says, "Some women experience irregular menstrual bleeding, nausea, headaches, dizziness, breast tenderness and mood changes when using the patch." There may also be a higher risk of blood clots in women using the patch as compared with the pill. Some users of the patch also reported skin reactions at the site of application of the patch.

What should I do if the patch falls off or if I forget to take it off?

If the patch does not stick well to your skin, apply a replacement patch. It is important that you do not use the patch over any makeup, creams, lotions or any other skin products as they may cause the patch to lose its stickiness and fall off. Skin products can affect how the hormones are absorbed by the skin. Dr Loi also advises, "Let your doctor know should the patch fall off or if you forget to remove it. If this situation arises, you may need to use a backup form of birth control (such as condoms) or abstain from sex for a while to protect against pregnancy."

Are there any medical conditions that will prevent me from using the patch?

The patch releases 60 per cent

more estrogen than a typical birth control pill, increasing the risk of blood clots. Thus, Dr Loi says that it is not recommended for women who have had blood clots before, severe high blood pressure, certain types of cancer, certain types of migraine headaches or diabetes. She also advises that women who have had unexplained vaginal bleeding or suspect that they are pregnant should talk to their doctors and discontinue using the patch for the time being. Other forms of birth control should be used instead.

The Lowdown on the Ring

What is the Vaginal Ring?

Dr Christopher Ng, obstetrician and gynaecologist at GynaeMD Women's and Rejuvenation Clinic, Camden Medical Centre says, "A vaginal ring is a contraceptive and is a ring-shaped device that is inserted into the vagina once a month. After insertion, it is left in the vagina for three weeks and then removed for one week. After that, a new ring is inserted." Once it is inserted into the vagina, the vagina ring releases a steady and continuous amount of hormones that prevents pregnancy by inhibiting ovulation.

How is the Vaginal Ring inserted and removed?

The vagina ring is flexible, causing it to be easily inserted and removed. Dr Ng demonstrates how to insert the ring. He says, "Squeeze the ring between your thumb and index finger so that the ring is flattened. Then, gently insert it into your vagina. The muscles in your vagina should keep the vagina ring in place. Removal is just as easy. Use your index finger to hook the ring out or hold the ring between your index finger and middle finger to pull it out slowly."

The Birth Control Patch is an effective form of contraception and gives good control of the menstrual cycle. It is especially useful for women who are forgetful and find it difficult to remember to take a pill every day or who have difficulty swallowing pills.

“Dr Ng says, “Inform your gynaecologist about any preexisting medical conditions that you might have. They include smoking history, family medical history, history of toxic shock syndrome, depression, liver or kidney disease, high blood pressure or migraines”

How effective and safe is the Vaginal Ring?

If the vaginal ring is used properly as directed, it is 99 per cent effective in preventing pregnancy. Dr Ng adds, “The vaginal ring is very safe for the majority of women. However, for women who smoke, are obese and are over 35 years old, it is not advisable to use this form of birth control as it increases the risk of blood clots, strokes and heart attacks.”

What are the benefits of the Vaginal Ring?

It is as effective as the pill in preventing pregnancy and you do not have to remember to take a pill every day.

What are the disadvantages of the Vaginal Ring?

Some of the common side effects of using the vaginal ring are tissue irritation of the vagina, headache, mood swings, vaginal discharge, nausea and vomiting. Dr Ng says, “The more serious side effects include Toxic Shock syndrome which causes high fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, sunburn-like rashes, muscles aches and fainting spells.”

What should I do if the ring falls out?

Dr Ng assures, “If inserted correctly, the ring is unlikely to slip out. In the event that it does fall out, you will still


be protected if you insert the ring back within three hours. Simply rinse the ring with cold or lukewarm water before you insert it back into the vagina.” If it is out of the vagina for more than three hours, extra emergency contraception may be needed and it is recommended that you see your doctor.

Will I or my partner feel the Vaginal Ring during intercourse?

Most couples do not feel the ring during intercourse or they do not mind it.

If it does bother you or your partner, remove the ring and reinsert it back within three hours.

Does my doctor need any specific information before I can start using Vaginal Rings?

Dr Ng says, “Inform your gynaecologist about any pre-existing medical conditions that you might have. They include smoking history, family medical history, history of toxic shock syndrome, depression, liver or kidney disease, high blood pressure or migraines.” Your gynaecologist will then advise you on the next step. 

With the Vaginal Ring, periods will also be lighter, shorter and less painful. In addition, there will be no delay in the return of fertility should you decide to stop using it.

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