



Birth Control: the Vaginal Ring

The **vaginal ring** is a birth control you place in your vagina. The ring contains estrogen and progestin which are similar to the hormones that are naturally made in a woman's body. The ring prevents pregnancy by stopping the egg from being released by the ovary. The ring also changes the mucus at the cervix to keep sperm from reaching an egg.

Advantages of the ring

- More than 91 percent effective with typical use
- Lighter menstrual periods
- Regular periods
- May improve premenstrual syndrome (PMS)
- May improve menstrual cramps
- Can improve acne
- Can decrease risk of uterine and ovarian cancer

Disadvantages of the ring

- Possible **side effects include**: breast tenderness, nausea, unusual bleeding, headaches and mood changes. Many of these symptoms improve with time.
- The ring may interact with certain antibiotics, anti-seizure, and HIV medicines.

How to use it

- Place the ring in your vagina and leave it there for three weeks. On the 4th week, you remove the ring for one week and get your period.
- It is important that you place your ring on time every 4 weeks.
- **If you are late (less than 48 hours) inserting a new ring**, insert the ring as soon as possible. Emergency contraception is usually not needed.
- **If you are late (more than 48 hours) inserting a new ring**, insert the ring as soon as possible. Use back-up contraception, like condoms, or avoid having sex until the ring has been worn for one week. Emergency contraception should be considered if you have had unprotected sex in the last 5 days.

Risks

- **Blood clots:** The ring can increase the risk of having a stroke or heart attack. Blood clots can develop in veins (deep vein thrombosis) and in the lungs (pulmonary embolism). These conditions are rare, but can be life-threatening.
- **High blood pressure:** The ring can slightly increase your blood pressure. For most women, this increase is small and does not affect one's health.

Who cannot use it

The ring **should not** be used by women who have:

- High blood pressure
- A blood clotting disorder
- Had a baby within the last three weeks
- Severe liver disease
- Certain types of migraine headaches
- A history of a blood clot, stroke or heart disease

Tell your health care provider if you have any of these risk factors or conditions, or any other medical concerns.

When to call the doctor

Call the doctor or healthcare provider if you:

- Think you are pregnant
- Think you might have a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Miss a period or are late in starting your period
- Have new or worsening headaches
- Have depression or change in mood

When to go to the emergency room

Go straight to the emergency room if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Sudden change in vision
- Severe headache
- Unusual pain in your chest
- Difficulty breathing or speaking
- Weakness or numbness
- Unusual pain or swelling in the legs

Preventing STIs

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 when you have sex. Get yearly health check-ups, including testing for STIs.