
Get the facts about...

Contraceptive Patch (Ortho Evra)

Choosing birth control...

There are two ways to enjoy sex without getting pregnant...sex other than vaginal intercourse or vaginal intercourse with birth control. The use of birth control is an individual and private matter. It affects your body, relationships and lifestyle. There is no perfect choice in birth control. Get the facts you need and talk to people you trust. Always use male latex or female condoms along with your birth control method to lower your chance of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV - the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Does the Patch protect me from STIs and HIV?

The Patch does not protect against STIs. Always use a latex condom or the female condom when you have sex to reduce your risk of getting an STI or HIV infection.

How does the Patch work?

The Patch works like the birth control pill. By using a combination of the synthetic versions of the hormones called estrogen and progesterone it stops your ovaries from releasing an ovum (egg) each month. Where there is no egg, pregnancy cannot occur. The Patch makes the mucus in the cervix thicker. This makes it harder for sperm to get into the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the uterus (womb). It also changes the lining of the uterus so it is harder for a fertilized egg to attach to the uterus.

What is the Contraceptive Patch?

Ortho Evra is the first contraceptive patch available in North America. It is a small, smooth, beige square patch worn on the skin. The patch transmits hormones through the skin.

How do I use the Patch?

- The patch can be placed on the buttocks, abdomen, upper torso (front or back, not the breasts), or upper outer arm.
- The patch is worn for one week at a time and is changed on the same day of the week for three weeks in a row.
- You must always change it on the same day of the week, on “patch change day”.
- You should change the patch site each week to avoid irritation.
- The fourth week is “patch free” during which time you should menstruate (get your period).
- The patch can be started either on the first day of menstrual bleeding or on the Sunday after menstruation begins.
- If you start it on the first day of bleeding, it is effective immediately, if you start it on the Sunday after menstruation you must use a back-up contraception (condoms & foam or sponge) for the first week.
- The patch can be worn while swimming, exercising, showering, bathing, or during hot and humid weather.

Can any woman use the Contraceptive Patch?

No. You must get a prescription from a health care provider in order to use Ortho Evra. You should speak to your doctor about whether or not this form of birth control is for you. Ortho Evra may not be for you if you smoke cigarettes (especially if you are older than 35), you are breastfeeding, you weigh more than 198 pounds, you have been diagnosed with breast cancer, you have or have had heart disease, serious liver disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, you have a history of blood clots, you experience headaches with an aura or if you are pregnant.

What are the side effects of the Patch?

When you start using Ortho Evra you may feel some minor side effects. They may include:

- Breast discomfort
- Headache
- Irregular or increased bleeding
- Skin irritation at patch site (you should change the patch site each week)
- Nausea
- Menstrual cramps
- Upper respiratory infection
- Changes in appetite
- Depression or sadness

If the minor side effects are very uncomfortable or last longer than a few weeks, you should speak to your doctor about your concerns.

What are some advantages of the Patch?

- 92%-99.7% effective.
- You do not have to remember to take a pill every day.
- You do not have to think about birth control when you have sex.
- If you decide that you no longer want to use birth control, you can stop using the patch immediately.

And because Ortho Evra works like the birth control pill it should provide:

- Predictable, regular menstrual cycles
- Decreased menstrual cramps and blood loss
- Less acne
- Some protection for ovarian and uterine lining cancer.

What are some disadvantages of the Patch?

- Some side effects (see above).
- Can be expensive.
- You must have a prescription in order to use Ortho Evra.
- Unlike the pill, which comes in many different hormonal levels, Ortho Evra currently offers only one hormonal dose.
- The hormones pass more quickly into the bloodstream through the skin than with the Pill so the side effects can be felt more strongly.
- Does not provide protection from sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
- Currently available in only one skin tone.

Where to get more information:

You can get more information from your public health nurse, community health clinic, doctor or pharmacist. You can call the **Facts of Life Line** to talk about birth control, sexuality, relationships, STIs and pregnancy options. **Call the Facts of Life Line at 947-9222 in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-432-1957.**

You can also check out these websites:

<http://www.orthoevra.com>; <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/birth-control-patch-ortho-evra-4240.htm>; or <http://www.serc.mb.ca>.