
Get the facts about...

Vaginal Ring

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 vaginal ring protect me from STIs and HIV?

No. The vaginal ring does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections. Always use a latex condom or female condom when you have sex to reduce your risk of getting an STI or HIV infection.

How does the vaginal ring work?

The vaginal ring releases hormones (progestin and estrogen) that prevent your ovaries from releasing an ovum (egg) each month. Where there is no egg, pregnancy cannot occur. The ring makes the cervical mucus thicker. This makes it harder for sperm to get through the cervix. The cervix is the entrance 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 vaginal ring?

The vaginal ring is a small, soft, flexible plastic ring placed into the vagina once a month. It contains human-made hormones similar to the natural hormones estrogen and progesterone. The vaginal ring slowly releases hormones into the body through the vagina. The ring is currently available under the name NuvaRing®.

How do I use the vaginal ring?

The ring comes in only one size. It fits into the vagina of any woman. Use your thumb and index finger to press the sides together. Gently push the folded ring inside your vagina. Insert the ring deep in the vagina, for comfort and to reduce the chance of it slipping out. Leave the ring inside the vagina for three weeks. After three weeks, remove the ring. You do not need to wear the ring on the fourth week. You will get your period during this ring-free week.

Following the ring-free week, you need to insert a new ring to continue protection from pregnancy and start a new cycle. Insert the ring on the same day and at the same hour each month.

Can any woman use the vaginal ring?

Not all women can use the vaginal ring safely. The ring might not be for you if you smoke. Talk to your health care provider about the vaginal ring to find out if there is any reason you cannot use it.

Where can I get the vaginal ring?

You can get the vaginal ring from your health care provider, a teen clinic or a walk-in clinic.

What are the side effects of the vaginal ring?

Some side effects may include:

- bleeding between periods
- breast tenderness
- headaches
- nausea
- vaginal irritation or infection
- vaginal discharge
- changes in mood
- weight gain

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

Call your doctor right away if you have: sharp chest pain, coughing blood, calf pain, vision loss, sudden fever, swelling in fingers or ankles or breast lumps.

What are some advantages of the vaginal ring?

- 92% - 99.7% effective.
- You do not have to remember to take a pill every day; insert the ring once a month.
- 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 vaginal ring immediately.

And because the vaginal ring works like the birth control pill it should provide:

- Predictable, regular menstrual periods
- Decreased menstrual cramps and blood loss
- Less acne (for most women)
- Some protection from ovarian and uterine lining cancer

What are some disadvantages of the vaginal ring?

- Some side effects (see above)
- Can be expensive
- You must have a prescription in order to use the vaginal ring
- Unlike the pill, which comes in many different hormone levels, the vaginal ring currently offers only one hormonal dose
- Does not provide protection from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- You must remember to change the ring once a month at the correct time
- You must be comfortable inserting and removing the ring from your vagina

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.nuvaring.com>; <http://www.serc.mb.ca>; or <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/birth-control-vaginal-ring-nuvaring-4241.htm>.