



when you  
choose the  
patch

Public Health  
Seattle & King County 

## What to Do if You Have a Problem

Serious problems happen rarely. The most serious problem is the possibility of blood clots, and it usually starts with warning signs. Know these signs, and contact your health provider, clinic, or emergency room if you have any of the following:

- Severe pain in your belly
- Severe chest pain or shortness of breath
- Severe pain or redness and swelling in your leg
- Severe headaches
- Eye problems, such as blurry vision, flashing lights or blindness

## Effectiveness

The Patch is **just as effective** as the Pill. If 100 women used the Patch correctly for a year, only 1 of them would get pregnant. The Patch is less effective for women who weight more than 198 pounds.

**EC: Don't forget about Emergency Contraception (EC)! If your patch was partly or completely off for 24 hours or more, OR left on more than 2 days after it should have been changed, and you have unprotected sex, EC can help prevent you from getting pregnant.**

## Pregnancy and the Patch

Your ability to get pregnant will return soon after you stop using the Patch. If you know you don't want to be pregnant, start using another birth control method! If you do want to get pregnant, start taking vitamins with folic acid — it's one of the best things you can do for your future child.

## Common Questions

### Will the Patch fall off?

Only about 3% of all patches come off. This usually happens because the Patch wasn't put on correctly. Remember — the Patch was made to **stay on!** You can help it stay on by checking your patch every day to make sure that the edges are still sticking.

### Can I decorate or cut my patch?

No! Though it may sound fun, coloring or writing on the Patch can make it less effective. Cutting the Patch can decrease the amount of hormone that you get through your skin, and put you at risk of getting pregnant.

### Am I still protected from pregnancy during the Patch Free Week?

Yes! Your Patch Free Week allows your body to have a period, but you are still protected from pregnancy during this time. You are only at risk of pregnancy if you go for **more than 7 days** without a Patch.

### How do I change my Patch Change Day?

If you want to change your Patch Change Day to a different day of the week, finish your current cycle of patches. During your Patch Free Week, you can choose a new Patch Change Day by applying a new patch on the day you want.

**REMEMBER: don't go more than 7 days without a Patch!**

**FACT: Using the Patch will not affect your future ability to have children.**

## To learn more about other reversible birth control methods:

### Check out our brochures on:

The Pill  
Depo Provera ("The Shot")  
Emergency Contraception ("EC")  
Condoms  
The IUD  
The Ring

### Check out our website at:

[www.kingcounty.gov/health/famplan](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health/famplan)

## To find a Family Planning Provider near you:

Call the Family Planning Hotline  
1-800-770-4334 **OR** TTY 1-800-848-5429  
For confidential information and referrals

## To prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or after your birth control method fails:

Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline:  
1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)  
or check out the Emergency Contraception website:  
**[www.not-2-late.com](http://www.not-2-late.com)** to find a clinic or pharmacy near you.

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## What is it?

The contraceptive patch is a thin, soft plastic patch — about the size of a matchbook — that you wear on your skin to prevent pregnancy.

**FACT: The Patch is a once-a-week method of birth control.**

## How the Patch Works

The Patch contains hormones just like the ones in most birth control pills. It releases these hormones through your skin and into your bloodstream. Instead of taking a pill every day, you stick on a new patch each week.

## Getting Started with the Patch

To get the most positive start with the Patch, take some time to learn about it now:

- The easiest time to start using the Patch is on the 1st day of your period, but your health provider will tell you the best time to start based on your cycle.
- The day you start will become your weekly Patch Change Day. For example, if you start your first patch on a Sunday, then you will always change your patches on a Sunday.
- Apply a new patch each week, for 3 weeks in a row (3 patches total). When you reach week 4, **don't** apply a patch. This is your Patch Free Week, and you will get your period during this time.
- After the Patch Free Week, start a new 4-week cycle — even if you are still bleeding.
- If you start using the Patch on the 1st day of your period, you have **immediate** protection from pregnancy. If you start at any other time, you need to use a back up method like condoms for **7 days**.

## How to Apply the Patch

The Patch was made to **stay on** and stay effective, as long as you put it on correctly! Follow the steps below to become a worry-free Patch user:

- There are 4 (and **only** 4) places you can put the Patch: your outer upper arm, your upper body (front and back), your buttocks, or your belly. Don't ever put the Patch on your breasts!
- Make sure the skin where you stick the patch is clean and dry (no lotion, oil, powder or make-up), without any cuts or irritation.
- Peel away the packaging without touching the sticky side of the patch.
- Press the patch to your skin firmly for **10 seconds**, making sure all the edges stick.
- You can shower, bathe, exercise, even swim - as long as the patch is stuck on, it will and stay effective.

## How to Change the Patch

After 1 week it will be your Patch Change Day, and time to put on a new patch. Follow these steps:

- Remove the patch by lifting one corner and quickly peeling it back (this should not hurt!).
- Fold the used patch in half (sticky side stuck to sticky side) and throw in the trash, **not** the toilet.
- If your skin still has some adhesive on it, try rubbing a small amount of baby oil on the area.
- Put a new patch on a **different** place on your skin (but still one of the 4 places!) — this helps avoid skin irritation.

**“Being a single mom, I am just too busy to remember to take a pill every day. The Patch is easy, and I only have to deal with it once a week.”**

**— Tanya, age 22  
mother of one**

## What to Expect: Common Side Effects

You may have side effects with the Patch. Usually, these side effects will go away after 2-6 months, as your body gets used to the Patch. Some common side effects are:

- breast tenderness
- bleeding between periods
- headaches
- nausea (very rarely, throwing up)
- skin irritation where the patch is worn
- feeling bloated
- changes in mood

If you feel that these side effects are becoming a problem for you, **don't** stop using the Patch! Call your health provider or clinic **first**.

## When You Forget to Change a Patch

There may be times when you forget to change a patch. Sometimes, a patch may fall off. The steps below will help you to get back on schedule when this happens. If you're ever unsure about what to do, call your health provider or clinic.

If a patch has been off for **less than 24 hours** or you forget to change your patch until the next day:

- Put on a new patch **as soon as you remember**
- Your Patch Change Day stays the same
- No back-up method is needed

If a patch has been off for **more than 24 hours** or you forget to change your patch for **more than 2 days**:

- Put on a new patch **as soon as you remember**
- You now have a new Patch Change Day
- Use a back-up method like condoms for **7 days**

If you forget to take off a patch for the Patch Free Week:

- Take it off as **soon as you remember**
- Your Patch Change Day stays the same
- Don't go **more** than 7 days without a Patch!

## Benefits of Using the Patch

Women choose the Patch because it is easy to use and is effective. Here are some of the reasons why women choose the Patch:

- Effective (just as effective as the Pill)
- Easy: no pills to take every day — just change your patch once a week!
- Regular, lighter, and shorter periods
- Won't interrupt sex

**FACT: You can shower, bathe, swim and exercise with the Patch and it will still be effective!**

## Some Disadvantages: What You Should Know

While the Patch is a popular method for some women, it isn't the best choice for everyone. The list below will help you to understand why the Patch may not be the best choice for some women:

- The Patch does not protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STDs). You need to use a **condom** if you think you need protection.
- The Patch isn't invisible — some women want a method that no one else can find out about.
- You have to remember to change your patch each week, and to remove a patch for the Patch Free Week.
- You do not have the option of skipping your period with the Patch.
- The Patch is less effective for women who weigh 198 pounds or more.