



Vaginal Contraceptive Ring

What is the Vaginal Contraceptive Ring?

The vaginal contraceptive ring, also known as the ring or NuvaRing, is a safe, convenient and highly effective form of contraception. When used properly it prevents pregnancy over 99% of the time. The ring is a soft, two-inch in diameter ring that is inserted into the vagina and delivers estrogen and progesterone (the main female hormones) in steady, low doses. It works mainly by stopping the monthly release of the egg from the ovary and thickening the cervical mucus which acts as a barrier to sperm. The hormones contained in the ring are the same as the ones used in some birth control pills and have been studied extensively.

Rings do not protect a woman from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. Remember to use safer sexual practices.

Benefits

There are many benefits to using hormonal contraceptives such as the ring in addition to prevention of pregnancy.

- The ring eliminates the need for daily pill taking
- Menstrual periods are predictable and are often shorter, lighter and associated with less cramping
- Improvement in acne as well as a reduced incidence of anemia, ovarian cysts and benign breast masses
- Reduced risk of both ovarian and uterine lining cancer and no apparent increase in the risk of breast cancer
- They do not make it more difficult to get pregnant in the future
- No medical need to “take a break” from hormonal contraception

Side Effects

Women using the ring may experience side effects in the beginning that may be annoying but are not harmful to their health. If they do not go away after the first few months you should discuss them with your health care provider and may need to consider a different method. Overall, very few women have side effects related to the ring. Those that are related to the hormones could include headache, nausea, breast pain or mood changes. Weight gain is not common. Side effects related to the ring itself could include vaginal discomfort or irritation, or an increase in vaginal discharge.

Complications

Serious complications are rare but may include blood clots, stroke, high blood pressure or benign liver tumors. Your health care provider will review your health history and discuss any possible risks. Smoking cigarettes increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, which can be worsened with use of hormonal contraceptives as women get older. Women who are older than 35 and smoke cigarettes should not use hormonal contraceptives.

Call your health care provider right away if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Severe chest pain and shortness of breath
- Severe headaches or sudden disturbances in speech or vision
- Weakness or numbness in an arm or leg
- Severe pain in a calf or thigh muscle

Using the Ring

The ring is typically started within the first five days of the menstrual period although you and your medical practitioner may decide to begin at a different time. A second method of birth control such as a condom should be used for the first seven days. After that first week you are protected at all times as long as the ring is used properly. Each ring stays in the vagina for three weeks and then is removed for one week. The menstrual period will occur during this week and typically starts a few days after the ring is removed. Insert a new ring one week after the old one was removed even if the menstrual period has not ended.

To insert the ring, simply pinch it and gently push it high into the vagina. The exact position of the ring does not matter and there is no wrong way to insert the ring. As long as it is in the vagina it will be working properly. If the ring slips down close to the vaginal opening a woman may be aware of its presence and should just push it back into a higher position in the vagina. The ring can be left in place during sexual intercourse but if it is bothersome it can be removed. It should be replaced as soon as possible and **MUST** be replaced within three hours.

To remove the ring, hook your finger under the ring and pull it out. Place the ring back in the foil pouch and discard in a waste basket out of the reach of children and pets (do not flush it down the toilet)The ring can slip out by itself although this is uncommon. Women who have weak pelvic floor muscles or constipation are at greater risk. It could also occur with sexual intercourse so it may be a good idea to check for the ring after sex. If the ring is ever removed or slips out of the vagina it should be rinsed with cool or lukewarm (not hot) water and reinserted as soon as possible.

When to use a second method of contraception or consider Emergency Contraception

A second form of birth control (not a diaphragm) should be used for seven days if the ring is out of the vagina for more than three hours during the three weeks of wear or if a new ring is not reinserted within one week of removing the old one. If the ring is left in place for more than four weeks, replace it and use a second method for the first seven days of the new ring. Emergency contraception (Plan B) should be used as soon as possible if there is ever a concern about loss of protection from pregnancy.

Very few medications will decrease the effectiveness of the ring. Talk to your health care provider when using other medications. Use of vaginal spermicides or vaginal creams to treat yeast infections will not decrease the effectiveness of the ring. Tampons will not interfere with use of the ring.

Please contact the University Health Center if you have any questions or concerns about the vaginal contraceptive ring.