

## The Contraceptive Ring

### How to insert a vaginal ring

With clean hands, squeeze the ring between your thumb and finger, and gently insert the tip into your vagina.

Gently push the ring up into your vagina until it feels comfortable.

Keep the foil pouch the ring comes in to put the ring in when you throw it away.

If you can feel the ring and it's uncomfortable, push it a bit further into your vagina. There isn't a right or wrong place for it to be, if it isn't uncomfortable.

You should be able to check that a ring is still there using your fingers. If you can't feel it, but you're sure it's there, talk to your doctor or nurse. A ring cannot get 'lost' inside you.

### How to remove a vaginal ring

After a vaginal ring has been in your vagina for 21 days, you remove it. This should be on the same day of the week that you put it in.

With clean hands, put a finger into your vagina and hook it around the edge of the ring.

Gently pull the ring out.

Put it in the foil pouch provided and throw it in the bin – do not flush it down the toilet.

If you have any bleeding or pain, or you can't pull it out, tell your doctor or nurse immediately.

There are several choices about how to use your ring:

Standard use 21 days: Use your ring for 21 days, then have a 7-day break when you are likely to have a withdrawal bleed then restart on day 8. Remember a ring only works for 21 days as contraception.

Tailored use (Shortened hormone-free interval): Use your ring for 21 days then have a 4-day break when you may have a withdrawal bleed then insert a new ring on day 5. Remember a ring only works for 21 days as contraception.

Extended use (tricycling) 9 weeks: Use your ring for 9 weeks replacing it every 3 weeks then take a 4- or 7-day break, restarting on the 5th or 8th day Remember a ring only works for 21 days as contraception.

Flexible extended use: Use your ring for at least 3 weeks. If breakthrough bleeding occurs for at least 3 days, then have 4 ring free days and restart on the 5th day. Remember a ring only works for 21 days as contraception.

Continuous use: Use your ring continuously changing every 21 days but with no break. Breakthrough bleeding may occur but usually settles. Remember a ring only works for 21 days as contraception.

A ring still works if you vomit or have diarrhoea.

You can have sex and use tampons while a ring is in your vagina. You and your partner may feel the ring during sex, but this isn't harmful.

### **If you forget to take a vaginal ring out**

If a ring has been in for up to 7 days after the 21 days:

take the ring out as soon as you remember. You have 2 options, either:

you can put a new ring in straight away – you may not have a period-type bleed, but you may have spotting

do not put a ring in, have you 4 or 7-day break – you'll have a period-type bleed, and you should put a new ring in 4 or 7 days after the old one came out.

you're still protected against pregnancy, and you do not need to use additional contraception

If a ring has been in for more than 7 extra days (more than 28 days in total):

take the ring out as soon as you remember

put a new ring in straight away

use additional contraception (such as condoms) until a new ring has been in for 7 days

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you're unsure what to do.

### **If you forget to put a new ring in**

If you forget to put a new ring in, put one in as soon as you remember. Use extra contraception (such as condoms) for 7 days.

You may need emergency contraception if you had sex before you remembered to put a new ring in, and the ring-free break was 9 days or more in total. If this is the case, talk to your doctor or nurse.

### **If a vaginal ring comes out**

Sometimes a ring may come out on its own. This is called expulsion. This is most likely to happen after or during sex, or when you're constipated.

If a ring is out for more than 3 hours, you are not protected against pregnancy.

If a ring is out for more than 3 hours in the first or second week of using it, rinse it and put it back in. Use additional contraception for 7 days. You may need emergency contraception if you've had sex in the last few days. Talk to your doctor or nurse.

If a ring is out for more than 3 hours in the third week of using it, do not put it back in. Throw it away as normal. You have 2 options, either:

you can put a new ring in straight away – you may not have a period-type bleed, but you may have spotting

do not put a ring in, have a 7-day break – you'll have a period-type bleed, and you should put a new ring in 7 days after the old one came out (you can only choose this option if a ring was in continuously for the previous 7 days)

Whichever option you choose, use additional contraception until a ring has been in for 7 days in a row. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you've had sex in the last few days, as you may need emergency contraception.

### **Use of other medicines**

Some medicines can stop the ring from working.

These include:

- some medication that treats TB or fungal infections
- medication for HIV
- medication for epilepsy
- St Johns Wort

If you're taking any of these medicines, you'll need additional contraception. You may wish to change your form of contraception that isn't affected by your medication.

Always tell your doctor you're using the contraceptive patch if you're prescribed any medicine.

### **Side effects of the ring**

The combined method may cause temporary side effects. These are usually mild and settle within 3 months of starting.

### **Risks of using the ring**

There are some risks of using the combined patch method, but these are not common.

Seek URGENT medical attention if you experience any of the following rare symptoms which could indicate that you have a blood clot.

Painful swelling on one or both legs

Severe chest or stomach pain

Breathlessness or coughing with blood

A bad fainting episode or collapse

Unusual headaches

Difficulty with sight or speech

More severe migraine attacks than is usual for you

Numbness, weakness or pins and needles of a limb.

Combined hormonal contraception may slightly increase the risk of cervical cancer and breast cancer. This risk decreases when the patch is stopped. However, there is a protective effect for bowel, ovarian and endometrial cancer.

For more information, please contact Sexual Health West Sussex on 01903 285199 or visit our website on [www.sexualhealthwestsussex.nhs.uk](http://www.sexualhealthwestsussex.nhs.uk)