

## Fact Sheet

### Vaginal Contraceptive Ring (the ring)

#### What is the vaginal contraceptive ring?

The vaginal contraceptive ring is a method of birth control that uses hormones to prevent pregnancy. The ring contains two types of hormones, estrogen and progestin. A woman puts the ring into her vagina. Each ring stays in the vagina and prevents pregnancy for 3 weeks. At the end of 3 weeks, the ring is taken out of the vagina. Seven days later a new ring is put in. During the 7 days when there is no ring in the vagina, the menstrual period begins. The ring is a method of birth control that is reversible, meaning once you stop using the ring you can get pregnant.

#### How does the ring work?

The ring works by preventing ovulation (the release of an egg from a woman's ovary). It also makes the mucus in a woman's cervix (the opening to her uterus) thick so that sperm cannot pass into the uterus to reach the egg. The ring also thins the lining of a woman's uterus so that an egg cannot attach and develop into a pregnancy.

#### How well does the ring work to prevent pregnancy?

The ring works very well to prevent pregnancy. How well it works depends on if you use it the correct way all the time. If 100 women use the ring exactly right for a year only one woman might get pregnant. If the same 100 women use the ring for one year but do not always use it the right way, about 9 women might get pregnant. The ring works as well as birth control pills and the patch.

#### What do women like about the ring?

- The ring is a very effective method of birth control.
- This method of birth control is reversible (not permanent).
- The ring is private (no one but you needs to know).
- The ring does not need to be remembered every day.
- You do not need to interrupt sex to use the ring.
- You can usually get pregnant soon after you stop using the ring.
- Some women may have less pain and bleeding with their periods while they use the ring.

#### What do women not like about the ring?

- The ring DOES NOT protect you from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- The ring may cause changes in menstrual periods like spotting between periods, lighter or heavier periods, or no periods at all.
- The ring may interact with other medications you take, which may change how well the ring or the other medicines work.
- Sometimes a woman or her sexual partner may feel the ring in the vagina during sex.

#### What are the possible side effects of using the ring?

- Vaginal discomfort
- Vaginal infections
- The ring may come out of the vagina by itself
- Changes in your period
- Headaches or dizziness
- Larger breast size
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in mood, nervousness or depression
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Breast pain or breast tenderness
- Bloating or constipation
- Hair changes (hair loss)

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- or unwanted hair growth)
- Less desire for sex
- Changes in skin (acne, oiliness, darkening, rash)
- Changes in vision
- Problems with contact lenses
- Rare but serious allergic reaction

**Sometimes using the vaginal contraceptive ring can cause very serious health problems** like heart attack, stroke, blood clots, liver disease, or high blood pressure.

- ✓ DO NOT use the ring if you have any of the following:
  - Liver disease or liver tumor
  - History of blood clot, stroke, or heart attack
  - Diabetes for more than 20 years or diabetes with kidney or eye problems
  - Certain kinds of very bad headaches
  - Some types of heart disease
  - High blood pressure
  - Breast cancer
  - Some forms of Lupus
  - A certain type of organ transplant
  - An allergy to estrogen or progestin or the other ingredients in birth control pills
- ✓ DO NOT use the ring if it has been less than 21 days since you had a baby
  - If you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.
  - If you are 35 years old or older and smoke cigarettes.
- ✓ Talk with your health care provider about whether the ring is safe for you if you have:
  - Problems with your gallbladder
  - HIV, tuberculosis or a seizure disorder and use certain types of medications
  - If you are breastfeeding and less than one month post-partum

**Return to the health center as soon as possible if you have any of the following:**

- Shortness of breath
- Pain in your chest
- Sudden changes in your vision
- Very heavy vaginal bleeding
- New pain in your leg
- Lower stomach pain
- New or worse headaches
- New or worse depression
- A new lump in your breast
- Vaginal discharge that is not normal for you, or has a bad smell
- Vaginal pain or itchiness
- Missed 2 periods in a row or missed 1 period after not using the ring correctly, or think you might be pregnant
- Sudden nausea, vomiting, dizziness, faintness, numbness or weakness in the arms or legs

**Contact your health care provider** if you think you may have a sexually transmitted disease (STD), if you want to stop using the ring and start using another method, or if you are planning to have surgery.

- To decrease your risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), use a latex condom every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
- Emergency contraception (EC) prevents pregnancy when used no later than 3-5 days after unprotected sex. If you need EC or want more information, talk to your health care provider, family planning counselor, or pharmacist.