

NuvaRing (Vaginal Ring)

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is the NuvaRing?

The NuvaRing is a flexible, combined contraceptive vaginal ring, used to prevent pregnancy. NuvaRing contains a combination of progestin and estrogen, two kinds of hormones. The ring is inserted in the vagina and left there for 3 weeks. You then remove it for a 1 week free period. After the ring is inserted, it releases a continuous low dose of hormones into your body. The Nuva Ring is 99.7% effective against pregnancy with perfect use, and 93% effective with typical use.

What's in the NuvaRing?

NuvaRing contains two hormones: estrogen and progesterone. These hormones are synthetic versions of naturally occurring hormones. The ring works primarily by preventing ovulation. An advantage of the ring is that it is as effective as other combined hormonal contraceptives such as the pill or the patch, but has a slightly lower dosage of hormones.

How do I start the NuvaRing?

You can start the ring in two ways: 1) Start the day of your appointment or any day of your menstrual cycle. You must use backup contraception (condoms) for at least seven days. If you've had any unprotected intercourse, discuss this with your provider as you may need to check a pregnancy test. 2) Start during the first 5 days of your period. You don't need to use condoms, but this is always recommended for STI protection.

How do I insert the NuvaRing?

Each NuvaRing comes in a foil pouch. After washing and drying your hands remove the NuvaRing from its foil pouch. Keep the foil pouch for proper disposal of the ring after use.

You may choose any position that is comfortable for you: lying down, squatting, or standing with one leg propped on a chair. Hold the ring between your thumb and index finger and press the opposite sides of the ring together. Gently push the folded ring into your vagina.

The exact position of the NuvaRing in the vagina is not important for it to work. Most users do not feel the ring once it is in place. If you feel discomfort, the NuvaRing is probably not inserted far enough into your vagina. Just use your finger to gently push NuvaRing further into your vagina. There is no danger of NuvaRing being pushed too far up in the vagina or getting lost. Once inserted keep the NuvaRing in place for 3 weeks in a row. You do not need to remove the ring during sex. Check before and after sex to be sure the ring is in place.

NuvaRing may be used with a tampon. Be careful the ring does not expel when taking out the tampon.

The ring is usually left in during intercourse. If this causes any problem for your partner, you can remove the ring, but you must replace it within 3 hours. You should not do this more than once in 24 hours.

How do I remove it?

Remove the NuvaRing 3 weeks after insertion, on the same day of the week it was inserted and at about the same time. You can remove the ring by hooking the index finger under the rim and pulling it out. Place the ring in the foil pouch and dispose of it in a waste basket - do not flush it down the toilet.

Your menstrual period will usually start 2 to 3 days after the ring is removed and may not be finished

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before the next ring is inserted. To continue to have pregnancy protection, you must insert the new ring 1 week after the last one was removed, even if your menstrual period has not stopped.

After a 1 week ring free break, insert a new ring on the same day of the week as it was inserted last cycle.

If you leave the ring out for longer than 1 week, you may not be protected from pregnancy. You may insert the ring as soon as you realize this. You will then have to use condoms as a backup for seven days. If you've had unprotected intercourse, you should take emergency contraception. Consult with your provider regarding the need for a pregnancy test.

What if it slips out?

If the NuvaRing has been removed or accidentally expelled while removing a tampon, engaging in intercourse, or having a bowel movement the following is advised.

During the first or second week, if the ring is removed or expelled and has been out of the vagina for more than 3 hours, it may be washed and reinserted. However, an additional contraceptive method, such as condoms and spermicide should be used for the next 7 days, and emergency contraception should be used if you have had unprotected intercourse.

If you are in the third week of ring use and the ring has been out of the vagina for more than 3 hours, you should discard the ring and follow one of the following options:

Insert a new ring immediately to begin a new 3-week cycle.

or

Have a ring free week (your period should come during this week) and insert a new ring no later than 7 days from when the last ring was removed/expelled. This is only an option if the ring was used continuously for the preceding 7 days.

For either option you should use an additional method of contraception until the new ring has been used continuously for 7 days.

Can the ring be left in the vagina too long?

If the NuvaRing has been left in your vagina for an extra week or less (5 weeks total or less) remove it and insert a new ring after a 1 week ring-free break. Your period should come during this break. If the ring has been left in place for more than 5 weeks you may not be adequately protected from pregnancy and you must check to make sure you are not pregnant. When you get your period, insert NuvaRing during the first few days. You must use an extra method of birth control such as condoms and spermicide until the new ring has been in place 7 days.

What if I don't get my period?

Most users will get a lighter, less crampy period with the contraceptive ring. Sometimes a period may be very light or missed completely. As long as you haven't made any mistakes in using the ring, you shouldn't be concerned. But if you have any worries, you can check a home pregnancy test or consult with your provider.

Can I still use the ring with other vaginal medications or products?

It is safe to use most topical vaginal medications for yeast or bacterial vaginosis with the NuvaRing. Always let your medical provider know that you are using the ring when any medication is prescribed. It is also okay to use water-based lubricants with the ring. Oil or silicone-based products are not recommended.

What are the side effects?

Like all medicines, Hormonal Contraceptives (HCs) like the NuvaRing have side effects that you need to be aware of.

Rare but serious side effect of hormonal contraceptives (HC's):

Blood clots: HCs can make users slightly more prone to form blood clots. A blood clot can occur in a vein or artery and can have different symptoms depending on where it forms. Clots can occur in the legs, abdomen, heart, lungs, eye, or brain. In the brain, a clot could manifest as a stroke. The risk of these events occurring is very low, but increases in users who are smokers over age 35, or those with high blood pressure, clotting disorders, or migraines with aura. The warning signs of a blood clot spell out the word

ACHES:

- Abdominal pain
- Chest pain (also shortness of breath)
- Headaches (especially those that are new, severe, or associated with persistent dizziness, difficulty speaking, fainting, numbness or weakness in extremities)
- Eye problems (blurred vision or loss of vision)
- Severe leg pain (and/or redness and swelling in the calf or thigh)

If you develop any of the ACHES side effects while on HCs, call Health Services right away at 863-1330. If you need emergency medical attention, call EMS at 863-4111. If you are out of town, contact a local health provider or go to a hospital emergency room.

High blood pressure: HCs can raise your blood pressure. This is why we check your blood pressure a few months after you begin taking HCs.

Liver tumors: HCs have been associated with an increased risk of forming benign liver tumors. This is

a very rare occurrence, but you should contact your provider if you develop upper abdominal pain while taking HCs.

Cancer risk: HCs do not increase overall risk of cancer, including breast cancer. Any increase in breast cancer appears to be temporary and limited to current or recent HC use. Long-term cervical cancer risk is not increased by HCs but risk may be increased slightly in the short-term. Routine pap smear screening and the HPV vaccine can reduce this risk. The risk of both ovarian and endometrial cancers is reduced with HC use.

More common minor side effects of hormonal contraceptives (HCs)

Nausea: Some people experience some mild nausea when first starting HCs. Usually this goes away within a short time. If you have persistent problems or unusually severe nausea, contact your provider.

Spotting or breakthrough bleeding: This is vaginal bleeding that occurs while the ring is in place in your vagina. This is a very common side effect during the first 3 months of HC use. Consult with your provider if this is persistent.

Breast tenderness: Mild breast tenderness may occur after starting HCs. A supportive bra may be helpful. Usually it gets better within a few weeks. If you notice persistent discomfort or a discrete lump, make an appointment with your provider.

Mood changes: Some users may note increased moodiness after starting HCs. Discuss any concerns with your provider.

Decreased sex drive: While sex drive is affected by many things, the hormones in HCs can be a factor in decreased sex drive. If you are noticing this side effect, let your provider know. A change to another method can improve this.

Weight gain: Many patients ask about this side effect. Studies have shown that weight changes in young people on HCs are no different than people who don't take HCs. Some users have noticed mild weight change (1 to 2 pounds) and mild fluid retention on some types of HCs. Contrary to popular opinion, taking HCs should not make you gain 10 or 15 pounds.

Gallbladder disease: HCs may accelerate the formation of gallbladder stones in users who have a strong family history of gallstone disease.

Vaginal discharge: All menstruating people have a cyclical vaginal discharge. HC users may notice subtle changes, but most won't notice any changes.

What are the benefits of taking hormonal contraceptives (HCs)?

Regular cycles: HCs are great at regulating the menstrual cycle, and this is especially helpful for women with periods that come too often or too infrequently.

Reduced menstrual cramps: HCs can offer significant relief to people with painful menstrual cramps. They also reduce the amount of blood flow during the period. Less blood loss is helpful in preventing anemia.

Acne: We have known for years that HCs can improve some users' acne. Some users have a marked improvement, others less. If this is a concern for you, discuss it with your provider.

Other important benefits:

The risk of developing benign breast cysts, ovarian cysts, pelvic inflammatory disease, and tubal pregnancy are reduced by taking HCs. They also are associated with a markedly decreased risk of uterine cancer and ovarian cancer.

How can I get hormonal contraceptives (HCs) at Health Services?

Before you receive a prescription for HCs, we like to see you for a visit to take your medical history. Call Health Services at 863-3953 to schedule an appointment.

Can I skip a period on purpose?

There may be a week when you would really like to avoid your period because of a special trip or event. You may accomplish this by not taking a break from the NuvaRing. Instead, insert your next ring immediately after you finish 3 weeks on Nuvaring. Your period should hold off until you finish this cycle and you remove the ring for your ring-free week. Some users continuously cycle the ring by always skipping the placebo week. The ring can be left in for 4 weeks and replaced once per month. There can be spotting with this method. If this happens, stop the ring for 4 days to allow a withdrawal bleed. You can do this as long as you've had a ring in place for at least 21 days. . If you'd like to try this method, call your medical provider to discuss the details.

Are there interactions between my other medications and hormonal contraceptives (HCs)? (HCs)?

There can be interactions between HCs and other medications. Please consult with your provider. Common antibiotics and over-the-counter pain and cold medicines do not interact.

Do hormonal contraceptives (HCs) affect my ability to get pregnant later on?

There is no evidence that HC usage at any time is related to infertility.