Contraceptive Vaginal Ring (NuvaRing)

Combined Hormonal Contraceptives (CHC) such as the NuvaRing are contraceptive methods that contain two synthetic hormones—estrogen and progesterone—which are similar to those normally produced by a woman.

NuvaRing is a highly effective, flexible, transparent vaginal ring containing estrogen and progesterone used for birth control. If used correctly, it is 99% effective in preventing pregnancy.

CHC are very effective means of birth control. Research shows that out of 100 women using CHC correctly only one will become pregnant during a given year (99% effective). CHC is prescribed for many women in treatment of medical problems, such as painful, irregular or heavy periods, endometriosis, and ovarian cysts.

CHC help to prevent pregnancy, but will not prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STIs). Condoms may be used as a "back-up method" of birth control and may help to decrease the risk for transmission of STIs.

How do combined hormonal contraceptives work to prevent pregnancy?
CHC prevent pregnancy by:
- regulating hormone levels to inhibit ovulation
- producing thick cervical secretions which act as a physical barrier to sperm
- making the lining of the uterus less receptive to a fertilized egg

If you are sexually active, you may not be fully protected from pregnancy by CHC during the first seven days of use. Therefore, use a second method of birth control, such as foam and condoms, during the first seven days of your CHC method. Keep a second method of birth control (such as condoms) available at all times and learn to use it well. These measures are to avoid pregnancy. It is a good idea to always use a condom even when on a CHC method if you are at risk for sexually transmitted diseases.

Mechanisms of Action—How the NuvaRing Works
The vaginal ring prevents pregnancy the same way that the birth control pill works, except the medication is continuously absorbed through the vaginal wall instead of taken orally. The NuvaRing steadily releases 0.015 mg/day of ethinyl estradiol and 0.12 mg/day etonogestrel (estrogen and progestin). These hormones prevent ovulation, which means that the body does not release an egg that could be fertilized.

How to Start Using the NuvaRing
The vaginal ring uses a 28-day, 4-week cycle, like the birth control pill. You insert the ring into your vagina and leave it in place for three weeks. You then remove the ring for one week for a ring-free period.

Options for Starting the NuvaRing
There are three ways to start using your NuvaRing:
- Starting with a Period
- Today Start
- Alternative Calendar Start

Starting with a Period
Counting the first day of your menstrual period as Day 1, insert your first NuvaRing between Day 1 and Day 5 of the cycle, but at the latest on Day 5 (even if you have not finished bleeding). For instance, if your period starts on a Thursday, (Day 1) you can insert the ring any of these days: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday or Monday (Day 5). Whatever day of the week you choose will become the day you will always remove and replace subsequent rings. During the first week of the first cycle, use a backup method for birth control, such as condoms or spermicide.

Today Start
Start using the NuvaRing today. If you have had unprotected sexual intercourse since your last period, perform a pregnancy test prior to starting the NuvaRing. If it is negative, insert the NuvaRing today. Use
another method of birth control such as condoms or spermicide for the first 7 days of NuvaRing use.

**Alternative Calendar Start**

Insert the ring the first day of the month and remove it on the 25th day of every month. If you have had unprotected sexual intercourse since your last period, perform a pregnancy test prior to inserting the ring. Use another method of birth control such as condoms or spermicide for the first 7 days of NuvaRing use.

If You Are Switching from the Pill or Patch:

Insert the NuvaRing anytime during the placebo week of pills, or during the "patch free" week but no later than the day when you would have started either a new pill or patch cycle. No backup contraception is needed.

If you are at risk for sexually transmitted infection, it is a good idea to always use a condom even when using the NuvaRing.

**How to insert the NuvaRing:**

1. With clean hands, remove the NuvaRing from its foil pouch. Choose the position that is most comfortable for you: for example, lying down, squatting, or standing with one leg up.
2. Hold the NuvaRing between your thumb and index finger and press the opposite sides of the ring together to fold.
3. Gently push the folded ring into your vagina. The exact position of the ring in the vagina is not important for it to work properly. Although some women may be aware of the NuvaRing in the vagina, most women do not feel it once it is in place. If you feel discomfort, however, try to gently push the NuvaRing further into your vagina with your fingers.
4. The NuvaRing is not usually noticeable during sexual intercourse by male partners. If it is uncomfortable, however, the ring can be removed for up to 3 hours without loss of pregnancy protection. Before replacing the NuvaRing, it can be rinsed off with cool water (not hot) and reinserted.

**How to remove the NuvaRing:**

1. You can remove the NuvaRing by hooking your index finger under the forward rim of the ring or by holding the rim between the index and middle finger and pulling it out.
2. Remove the ring three weeks after insertion on the same day of the week as it was inserted. For instance, if you inserted the ring on Sunday, January 1, you will remove the ring on Sunday, January 22. Your period will start 2-3 days later (January 24 or 25). You will need to reinsert a new NuvaRing on the following Sunday (January 29, in the example) to start a new cycle.

**If the NuvaRing slips out:**

Rarely the NuvaRing can slip out of the vagina. If so, it can be rinsed with cool water (not hot) and reinserted. If it was out of the vagina for less than 3 hours then you are still protected from pregnancy. If it has been more than 3 hours then a backup birth control method or abstinence is advised until 7 consecutive days of ring use.

**Forgetting your NuvaRing:**

- If the NuvaRing is in your vagina for an extra week or less (4 weeks in total or less), remove it and insert a new ring after a 1-week ring-free break. You should still be protected from pregnancy.
- If the NuvaRing has been left in place for more than 4 weeks, you are at risk of a pregnancy. You may want to consider using emergency contraception. Use a backup method of birth control (such as a condom) until the new NuvaRing has been in place for 7 consecutive days.

When you insert your last NuvaRing, you will need to return to the student health service for a refill and/or annual exam. Call in advance for an appointment.

**Medications and CHC**

The following medications and supplements may interfere with the effectiveness of CHC:
We recommend that if you take the above medications and supplements and are sexually active with a male partner, you use a back-up method of birth control while using the medication and for 7 consecutive days once the medication is completed.

Other Medical Considerations
If a minor problem develops and you are considering stopping your CHC, call the student health services first. If you are unable to do this, use another method of birth control until you can get to the clinic. It is usually a good idea to complete the cycle unless the problem you are experiencing is serious.

When you are seeing a clinician for another problem, be sure and mention that you are using a combined hormonal contraceptive. This is particularly important if you have your leg in a cast, will be having surgery, or will be having medication prescribed. CHC may affect other medications.

If you decide you want to become pregnant, discontinue the use of the CHC at the end of a cycle. Use another method of contraception until you have had two or three normal menstrual periods. During this time, a multiple vitamin with folic acid is recommended to help prevent certain birth defects.

Smoking cigarettes while using CHC can increase a woman’s risk for heart attack, stroke and formation of blood clots. If you currently smoke you should consider quitting. Talk with your clinician about resources available to help you quit.

Benefits of CHC
Some benefits of CHC (besides effective birth control) include:
- improved menstrual regularity
- reduced blood flow during menstruation
- less iron-deficiency anemia
- reduced risk of ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer (cancer of the lining of the uterus)
- fewer functional ovarian cysts
- fewer ectopic pregnancies (pregnancies outside the uterus, in fallopian tubes)
- less fibrocystic breast disease (benign breast disease)
- less dysmenorrhea (painful periods)
- fewer fibroadenomas (benign fibrous-tissue tumors of the breasts)

Side Effects of CHC
Minor Side Effects
- spotting (light bleeding) between periods (will usually stop after 1 to 2 months)
- decreased menstrual flow, missed periods.
- depression, mood changes, fatigue (return to clinic if severe)
- decreased sex drive (rare)
- acne (most women notice a decrease, however)
- breast tenderness, fluid retention, weight gain
- chloasma - skin darkens on upper lip, under eyes or on forehead; sun may make it worse and it may become permanent
- more problems with yeast infections, vaginal discharge or itching

Serious Side Effects
- hypertension (high blood pressure), often reversible once CHC are discontinued

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gallbladder disease, with upper abdominal indigestion, gall stones

Possible Life-Threatening Side Effects
- blood clots
- heart attacks
- strokes

Please Read
Call the student health services or your health care provider if any of the following happens. If the student health service is closed, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call 911 for an ambulance. Do not wait for these symptoms to get better.
- severe abdominal pain or tenderness in the lower abdomen
- chest pain, sharp, sudden shortness of breath or coughing up blood
- headache, severe and sudden, or vomiting, dizziness or faintness
- eyesight problems, such as sudden blurred or doubled vision or flashes of light
- severe pain or swelling in calf or groin