

Vaginal Contraceptive Ring (NuvaRing)

What is the NuvaRing?

The **NuvaRing** is a flexible vaginal ring which is impregnated with the same hormones that are in birth control pills. The two hormones (estrogen and progestin) in the ring are absorbed through the vagina into the bloodstream. The hormones stop the ovary from producing an egg, so that pregnancy does not occur. The ring also prevents pregnancy by causing thickening of the mucus on the cervix, making it hard for sperm to enter the uterus.

The **NuvaRing** is highly effective if used correctly, around 98-99% effectiveness. It is a good method for women who have no contraindications to hormone use but may prefer not to have to take a pill daily. It has the same advantages in making periods lighter, less painful and more regular. Likewise, it can decrease the risks of ovarian and uterine cancer. The ring is easily inserted into the vagina and left for 3 weeks. It is removed for a one week period for the menses to occur and a new ring inserted. The ring protects against pregnancy but not against AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections.

When can I start using the NuvaRing?

If you have not been using a hormonal form of birth control (such as the pill, Norplant, Depo-Provera, or a Progestasert IUD), you start using the ring by inserting it into the vagina between days 1 and 5 of your menstrual period (Day 1 is the first day of your menstrual period.) When you start using the vaginal ring, you should use an additional form of birth control, such as male condoms or spermicide, until the ring has been in place for 7 days.

If you are switching from another form of birth control that uses hormones, the instructions for starting the ring and using extra methods of birth control are somewhat different. The instructions may also be different if you are using the ring after a first-trimester abortion or miscarriage or the birth of a child. Discuss this with your health care provider.

How do I use the NuvaRing?

- To insert the ring, wash and dry your hands, remove the ring from its foil pouch. Keep the foil pouch for disposal of the ring after use.
- Choose the position that is most comfortable for you for insertion. You may lie down, squat, or stand with one leg up. You may feel most comfortable using the same position you use for inserting tampons, if you use them.
- Hold the ring between your thumb and first or second finger and press the opposite sides of the ring together. Gently push the folded ring into your vagina. The exact position of the ring in the vagina is not important for it to work. However, the more deeply you insert the ring into your vagina, the less likely it is that you will feel it or that your partner will feel it during intercourse. It is also less likely that the ring will come out accidentally.
- Once inserted, keep the ring in place for 3 weeks in a row.
- Remove the ring 3 weeks after you put it in, on the same day and at the same time as you put it in.

- Remove the ring by hooking your first or second finger under the forward rim or by holding the rim between your index and middle finger and pulling it out.
- Place the used ring in the foil pouch and put it in the trash out of the reach of children and pets. Do not flush it down the toilet.

Your menstrual period will usually start 2 to 3 days after you remove the ring. To continue to be protected against pregnancy, you must insert a new ring 1 week after the last one was removed, even if your menstrual period has not stopped. If the vaginal ring is left in your vagina for an extra week or less (4 weeks total or less), remove it and insert a new ring after a 1-week break without the ring.

If a ring is left in place for more than 4 weeks, you may no longer be protected from pregnancy. In this case, before you insert a new ring, check to make sure you are not pregnant. Use an extra method of birth control, such as male condoms or spermicide, until a new ring has been in place for 7 days in a row.

What should I do if the ring accidentally comes out?

If the ring comes out, rinse the ring with cool or lukewarm water (not hot water) and put it back into the vagina as soon as possible. If the ring has been out of the vagina more than 3 hours before you reinsert it, the ring may no longer help to prevent pregnancy until your next period. You will need to use another means of birth control until the ring has been in your vagina for 7 days in a row.

What are the disadvantages of the NuvaRing?

Products containing estrogen are known to cause side effects in some women and are contraindicated in women with certain medical conditions. Please discuss this with your clinician and read the handout that comes with the product. The ring may not keep protecting you against pregnancy if you are taking antibiotics or medicines for seizures or fungal infections. The following is a list of conditions of contraindications to the use of NuvaRing:

- history of blood clots, heart attack, or stroke
- disease of the valves of the heart
- high blood pressure
- diabetes with blood vessel problems
- headaches with numbness or changes in your vision
- cancer of the breast or uterus
- vaginal bleeding of an unknown cause
- jaundice (a yellowing of your skin) when you were pregnant or when you used birth control pills
- liver tumors or other liver disease
- known or suspected pregnancy
- allergy to any of the hormones in the **NuvaRing**
- heavy smoking (15 or more cigarettes a day), especially if you are 35 or older
- recent long period of bed rest after major surgery or a broken bone in a cast.

Adapted from MD Consult