

## Answering Your Questions About the Birth Control Pill, Patch, and Vaginal Ring: What Are Your Benefits and Risks?

**You  
Decide.**

Making Informed  
Health Choices About  
Hormonal Contraception

### **I don't want to get pregnant right now. How effective are the birth control pill, patch, and vaginal ring (the "ring")?**

The birth control pill, patch, and ring are extremely effective in preventing pregnancy when used properly. They combine hormones like the ones your body makes. This combination helps keep the man's sperm from joining with the woman's egg, so you don't get pregnant.

### **I heard there are other benefits to using the pill, the patch, or the ring. What are they?**

Besides preventing pregnancy, you can get other benefits such as:

- Lighter periods
- Milder cramps
- Less acne
- Protection from some kinds of cancer

You can ask your health care provider about other benefits of using the pill, the patch, or the ring.

### **Will I be protected from sexually transmitted infections?**

No. The pill, the patch, and the ring do not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV/AIDS. You should always use a condom to protect yourself if you or your partner is at risk for STIs.

### **Will I have side effects?**

You could have some side effects. Usually, these side effects are mild, and you'll probably experience them for only two or three months. Side effects can include:

- Breast tenderness
- Feeling sick to your stomach
- Headaches
- Bleeding or spotting between periods

If you have any uncomfortable side effects, you should tell your health care provider.

### **What are my risks?**

Generally, women have a very low chance of serious problems when using the pill, the patch, or the ring. You could be more likely to have a serious problem if you have certain risk factors. For example, if you smoke or if you are older than age 35, you have a slightly greater risk. You can talk with your health care provider about your own personal risk factors.

### **Are there any warning signs I should watch for?**

Serious problems usually have warning signs. If you use the pill, the patch, or the ring, report *any* of these signs to your health care provider as soon as possible:

- Eye problems such as blurred or double vision
- Pain in the abdomen, chest, or arm
- Severe headaches
- Sudden shortness of breath or spitting up blood
- Unusual swelling or pain in the leg
- Worsening depression
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice)
- A new lump in the breast
- Unusual heavy bleeding from the vagina, *or*
- No period after having a period every month

### **Where can I get more information about the pill, the patch, and the ring?**

You can ask your health care provider for more information. You can also visit the Web sites of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals ([www.arhp.org](http://www.arhp.org)) or Planned Parenthood® Federation of America ([www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)) to learn more about the pill, the patch, the ring, and other birth control options.