

# Vaginal Contraceptive Ring



## Quick Facts

### Method

Hormonal

### Effectiveness

91-99.7%

### Return to Fertility

No delay

### Availability

Prescription required



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## What is it?

The vaginal contraceptive ring is a soft, flexible, latex-free ring containing oestrogen and progestogen hormones. The ring is inserted into the vagina by the woman.

The vaginal ring sits up high against the back of the vagina. When inserted correctly, most women cannot feel the vaginal ring. The vaginal ring comes in one size that fits all women.

## How does it work?

The vaginal ring releases a slow, steady flow of hormones. The walls of the vagina absorb these hormones and distribute them into the bloodstream, stopping ovulation (the release of an egg from the ovary). It also thickens the mucus in the cervix.

## How effective is it?

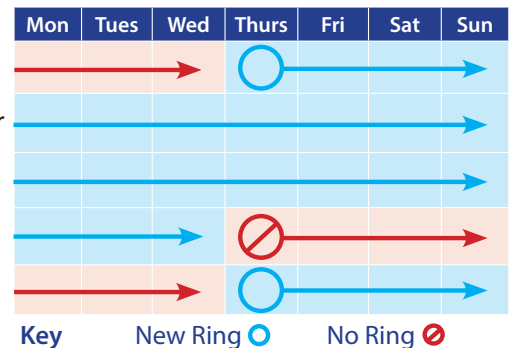
The vaginal ring is 91-99.7% effective at preventing pregnancy. Effectiveness depends on correct use.

## How do I use it?

### To insert the vaginal ring you need to:

- squeeze it between your thumb and index finger
- gently insert it into your vagina (similar to inserting a tampon).

Remember the exact position is not important for the vaginal ring to work. If you feel discomfort, simply slide the vaginal ring further into your vagina. Your vaginal muscles will keep the vaginal ring securely in place, even during exercise and sex.



To remove the vaginal ring simply put your finger into your vagina to hook the inside rim of the ring and pull it out.

The first vaginal ring is ideally inserted during the first five days of the menstrual cycle (first day being day one of bleeding), remaining inside the vagina for three weeks. At the start of the fourth week the vaginal ring is removed and bleeding occurs. A new vaginal ring should be inserted seven days after removing the previous one to maintain its contraceptive effect.

If the vaginal ring is inserted during the first five days of the menstrual cycle, or immediately after ceasing use of the combined oral contraceptive pill, contraceptive implant or injection, its contraceptive effect is immediate. If the vaginal ring is inserted later in the menstrual cycle, it will take seven days to become effective and another form of contraception (e.g. condoms) should be used.

If you don't want to have a bleed, leave the ring in for 3-4 weeks, at which time you remove it and insert a new one straight away.

Though it is not recommended, the vaginal ring can be taken out (e.g. during sex) if desired, but it must be reinserted within three hours to maintain its contraceptive effect. If preferred, you can rinse the ring with water before reinserting.

### What if I forget to use it?

You may wish to set up a dependable reminder system around when to insert a new ring i.e. on your phone or calendar.

If you are more than 24 hours late inserting a new ring at the start of a new cycle (more than seven days since your ring was last removed) or have left your ring in place continuously for more than four weeks; insert a new vaginal ring as soon as you remember and use another form of contraception for the next seven days (e.g. condoms).

If you have removed your ring for longer than three hours (e.g. during sex) then reinsert it as soon as you remember and use another form of contraception for the next seven days.

**If you've had sex without a condom and realise you're late inserting your ring, consider emergency contraception.**

Different methods of emergency contraception are available, such as emergency contraceptive pills and copper IUD. Emergency contraception is most effective when used as soon as possible after unprotected sex. Visit your doctor, pharmacist or ring the Sexual Health Helpline as soon as possible.

### Who can use it?

The vaginal ring is suitable for most women, but there may be health risks for some. It is ideally suited for women who prefer not to use a daily method of contraception.

**The vaginal ring may be unsuitable for women who have:**

- cardiovascular risk factors (smokers aged 35 and above, high blood pressure or deep vein thrombosis)
- had a stroke or a heart attack
- had active liver or gall bladder disease
- unexplained vaginal bleeding
- certain types of migraines with visual disturbances
- breast or uterine cancer.

Contraceptives containing oestrogen may not be suitable for women who are breastfeeding – please discuss with your doctor.

Women who are very overweight are advised not to use the vaginal ring as they have a heightened risk of deep vein thrombosis - speak to your doctor for more information.

### Advantages

- Less likely than the combined oral contraceptive pill to cause side effects such as nausea.
- Not affected by diarrhoea and vomiting. The hormones don't pass through the stomach, so absorption is not interfered with.
- Doesn't require a woman to remember to use a daily method of contraception.
- May result in less bleeding between periods.
- Suitable for women with conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease.

### Disadvantages

- May increase the risk of a woman developing deep vein thrombosis, which can lead to stroke or heart attack.
- Requires a woman to remember to insert a new ring every four weeks.

### Is there anything else I need to know?

- A doctor needs to know if you are taking any medication (prescribed, over the counter or herbal) as some products can react with the hormones in the vaginal ring.
- Vaginal rings should be used within four months of purchase and stored in the fridge.

**The vaginal ring does not protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs).**

*SHQ is on Whadjuk land. We acknowledge the traditional owners of country across Western Australia.*



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