

What Is It?

The vaginal ring is a flexible, plastic ring that you insert into the upper vagina. It is prescribed by a health care professional.

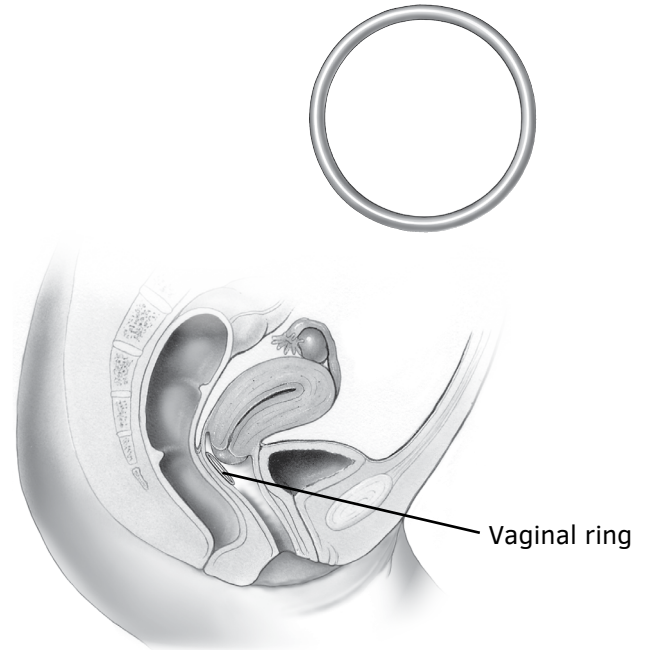
How Does It Work?

The ring releases hormones called estrogen and progestin, which are absorbed through the vaginal tissues into the body. Estrogen and progestin stop the ovaries from releasing an egg each month. These hormones thicken the cervical mucus, which makes it harder for sperm to reach the egg. They also thin the lining of the uterus.

How Do I Use It?

You fold the ring and insert it into the vagina. It stays there for 21 days. You then remove it for 7 days. At the end of the 7 days, insert a new ring. During the week that the ring is not used, you will have your period.

To use the ring as a continuous-dose form of birth control, insert a new ring every 21 days with no ring-free week in between. You will need your health care professional to prescribe extra rings if you choose to do this. In time, your period may become lighter or even stop.



Benefits:

- You do not need to remember it every day.
- It does not interfere with sex.
- It may make your period more regular, lighter, and shorter.
- It may reduce cramps, improve acne, reduce menstrual migraine frequency, and reduce unwanted hair growth.
- It reduces the risk of cancer of the uterus, ovary, and colon.

Risks

The ring is safe for most women. In some women, it is linked to a small increased risk of blood clots (deep vein thrombosis [DVT]), heart attack, and stroke. The ring is not recommended if you

- smoke and are older than 35
- have high blood pressure or a history of stroke, heart attack, or DVT
- have a history of migraine headaches with aura
- have certain medical conditions, such as some forms of lupus
- have breast cancer or a history of breast cancer

Possible Side Effects

- Headaches, breast tenderness, or nausea
- Vaginal irritation
- Vaginal discharge
- Breakthrough bleeding

Most side effects are minor and often go away after a few months of use.

Effectiveness of vaginal ring compared to other methods	Highly effective
	Less effective
Protects against STIs, including HIV?	No
Effective right away?	Yes, if you start using it within 5 days of the start of your menstrual period. If you start this method at any other time, avoid sexual intercourse or use a back-up method, such as a condom, for the next 7 days.
OK with breastfeeding?	Yes, after breastfeeding is established (usually 4 to 6 weeks after childbirth)

*Abbreviations: HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; STIs, sexually transmitted infections.