

Skidmore College Health Services

NuvaRing Fact Sheet

Effectiveness and Safety

NuvaRing is a flexible, combined contraceptive vaginal ring used to prevent pregnancy. The Ring contains hormones similar to those in birth control pills – progesterone and estrogen. When you wear the Ring, it delivers a steady stream of hormones into your bloodstream. The Ring is a safe and effective form of birth control. It is a slender, flexible, transparent vaginal ring, about as big around as a silver dollar. Most women who have used NuvaRing find that when used correctly, NuvaRing is 99% effective. This means that less than 1 woman out of every 100 using it will become pregnant during 1 year of continuous use. Like the pill, the Ring is felt to be very safe for most women. In the United States, it is safer to use the pill than to deliver a baby, unless a woman is over 35 years of age and smokes more than 15 cigarettes a day. It is likely that the same will be true for the Ring. **The Ring is indicated for the prevention of pregnancy and does not prevent against HIV or sexually transmitted infections.**

How the Ring Works:

The Ring contains synthetic versions of two substances your body produces naturally: estrogen and progesterone. These substances are female hormones, and they regulate your menstrual cycle. The hormones in the Ring prevent pregnancy mainly by preventing the ovary from releasing an egg. The Ring also thickens the cervical mucus so that sperm are less likely to enter your uterus. You insert the Ring in your vagina and leave it there for 3 weeks. You then remove it for a 1-week Ring-free period during which you should have your period. After the Ring is inserted, it releases a continuous low dose of hormones into your body. You are protected from pregnancy for the entire month.

Non-contraceptive Health Benefits of the Ring:

In addition to its contraceptive benefits, the Ring (like the pill) may offer many potential noncontraceptive benefits including the following:

- Menstrual cycles may become more regular
- Blood flow during menstruation may be lighter, and less iron may be lost. Therefore, anemia is less likely to occur.
- Pain or other symptoms during menstruation may be encountered less frequently.
- Ovarian cysts may occur less frequently.
- Ectopic (tubal) pregnancy may occur less frequently.
- Noncancerous cysts or lumps in the breast may occur less frequently.
- Acute pelvic inflammatory disease may occur less frequently.
- May provide some protection against developing two forms of cancer: cancer of the ovaries and cancer of the lining of the uterus.
- Improvement in acne.
- Decreased pain at time of ovulation.

Who can use the Ring?

Because the Ring is effective and easy to use, women who want a reversible form of birth control, but don't want to have to worry about taking a pill every day choose it. If you prefer a birth control method that is easy, convenient, and does not interfere with spontaneous sex, the Ring might be a good choice for you.

Who should *not* use the Ring?

Cigarette smoking increases the risk of serious adverse effects on the heart and blood vessels from use of the Ring. This risk increases with age and with heavy cigarette smoking (15 or more cigarettes per day) and is quite marked in women over 35 years of age. Women who use the Ring should not smoke.

While the majority of women can use the Ring safely, some women should not use it. This is especially so if you have had any of the following conditions:

- Heart attack or stroke
- Blood clots in the veins of your legs, lungs (pulmonary embolism), or eyes
- Known or suspected breast cancer or cancer of the lining of the uterus, cervix or vagina
- Liver tumor (benign or cancerous)
- Severe high blood pressure
- Diabetes with complications of the kidney, eyes, nerves, or blood vessels
- Headaches with neurological symptoms
- Disease of the heart valves with complications

Or, if you have any of the following:

- Chest pain (angina pectoris)
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding (until a diagnosis is reached by your health care provider)
- Yellowing of the whites of the eyes or of the skin (jaundice) during pregnancy or during previous use of contraceptives
- Known or suspected pregnancy
- Need for a long period of bed rest following major surgery
- An allergic reaction to any of the components of NuvaRing

Tell your health care provider if you have ever had any of these conditions. He or she can recommend another method of birth control.

Possible problems with the Ring: Common side effects

The common side effects of the Ring are vaginal infections and irritation, vaginal discharge, headache, weight gain, and nausea. Other possible side effects are vomiting, change in appetite, abdominal cramps and bloating, breast tenderness or enlargement, irregular vaginal bleeding or spotting, changes in menstrual cycle, fluid retention (edema), spotty darkening of the skin (particularly on the face), rash, and depression. Some women who wear contact lenses find that their lenses no longer fit or that they are uncomfortable.

Possible problems with the Ring: More serious side effects

In addition, some women using the Ring may experience serious problems. **Although these problems are rare**, they may cause serious disability or death and you need to be aware of them.

The serious side effects of the Ring occur very infrequently, especially if you are in good health and do not smoke. However, you should know that the following medical conditions may be associated with or made worse by the Ring:

1. Blood clots in the legs (thrombophlebitis) or blood clots in the lungs (pulmonary embolism), stoppage or rupture of blood vessel in the brain (stroke), blockage of blood vessels in the heart (heart attack and angina pectoris) and, rarely, blood clots in blood vessels of the eye (which may cause blindness). As mentioned previously, smoking while using the ring may increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes and increase the chance of developing and dying from heart disease.
2. Gallbladder disease.
3. Liver tumors, which may rupture and cause severe bleeding.
4. High blood pressure, although blood pressure may return to normal when Ring use is stopped.

The symptoms associated with these serious side effects are discussed in the package insert given to you with your Ring. If you experience any of these more serious side effects, immediately contact your health care provider. The warning signs (**ACHES**) for the more serious side effects include the following:

- **Abdominal pain (severe)**
- **Chest pain (severe)** or shortness of breath
- **Headaches (severe)**
- **Eye problems:** blurred vision, flashing lights, blindness
- **Severe leg pain (calf or thigh)**