Once you have decided to use birth control patches, it is important that you understand how to properly use them. The instructions below are for the most common way to use patches. Before starting your patches, you should review this information with your health care provider to make sure this is the way he or she would like you to use them.

**How birth control patches are packaged:**

- Each box of birth control patches contains three identical patches. One box of patches will be used every four weeks.
- Single patches are available to replace patches that are detached or lost. (Be aware that the cost of the single patches are often not covered by insurance and can be relatively expensive.)

**Where and how patches can be applied:**

- Patches can be applied to four areas of the body – (1) stomach, (2) upper outer arm, (3) upper chest or back, or (4) buttock. Do not place patches on the breasts.
- Clean and dry your skin well before applying the patch. Do not use lotions, oils, moisturizers, powders, medications, or make-up in the area where you will be applying your patch. These can interfere with the patch.
- Do not apply a patch to skin that is red, irritated, or cut.
- Do not put a new patch in the same place where you have just removed an old patch. Doing this increases the chances of skin irritation.
- Do not cut patches. Do not write on them or decorate them in any way.
- Other important information about applying patches is found in the patch box.

**The "Sunday start" method:**

- Apply your very first patch on the first Sunday after you start your next menstrual period, even if you are still bleeding. If you start your period on a Sunday, apply your first patch that same day.
- Each patch is worn continuously for seven days (one week). Every Sunday you will remove the patch from the previous week and put on a new one.
- If you forget to change your patch on a Sunday, you can apply your next patch as soon as you remember on the following Monday or Tuesday. Then, as always, change your patch on the next Sunday.
- If you are late in changing your patch by more than 2 days, call your health care provider for instructions.
- After using three patches in a row (three weeks), you will go without a patch for one week. This will be your "patch-free" week. During this week, you should begin your menstrual period. Never skip your patch-free week unless instructed to do so.
• During your patch-free week, make sure you get your next box of patches from your pharmacy. Not starting your new box of patches on time can lead to pregnancy if you are sexually active.

• On the Sunday at the end of your patch-free week, begin a new box of patches. Apply the first patch of the box that day, even if you are still having some menstrual bleeding. You should never be "patch-free" for more than seven days.

• Check your patch each day to make sure it is still attached well to your skin. If a patch comes loose or falls off, first try to reattach it. If the detached patch is no longer sticky, replace it with a new patch. This new patch should be worn until the next Sunday, when you change patches as usual. You may need to purchase a single replacement patch in order to complete your patch schedule.

• Any time that you have a question about using patches, contact your health care provider.

**Side effects:**

• Most patch users experience desirable changes in their menstrual cycle – predictable, shorter and lighter menstrual periods, and less menstrual cramping. Sometimes after being on patches for a while, users even skip periods.

• During the first month or two of patch use, "breakthrough bleeding" or spotting can occur at times when vaginal bleeding is not expected. This is normal. Continue using your patches as scheduled.

• Other side effects of the patch include headache, nausea and breast tenderness. These are most common during the first three months of use. If you have these symptoms beyond the first three months of use, talk to your health care provider.

• Skin irritation can occur at patch attachment sites.

• Birth control patches can interact with other medications. These interactions may make the patches less effective. Always let any health care provider know what medications you are using, including birth control patches.

• A rare side effect of patch use can be the formation of dangerous blood clots in the body’s circulation system. This is more likely to occur if the patch user has had similar problems previously, particular health conditions or a family medical history of certain blood clotting problems. Review your medical history with your health care provider before starting patches. Smoking also increases the risk of blood clots in patch users. Smoking is never healthy for teens, especially patch users. **Do not smoke.**

• Patches may not be recommended for young women with certain types of migraine headaches. If you suffer from migraines, discuss your headaches with your health care provider before starting birth control patches.

• Any time you feel you are having side effects related to patch use, talk to your health care provider.

**If you are using patches to help with your menstrual cycles, remember:**

• You may not notice much improvement in your menstrual period after the first month of patches. Don’t give up. Most girls have significant improvement by the end of their third month.

• If you do not stay on schedule for patch changes, you may have irregular or breakthrough bleeding.
If you are using patches to prevent pregnancy, remember:

- When used faithfully as directed, patches are 98% effective in preventing pregnancy. The only 100% effective method of birth control is abstinence (not having sex).

- Teens should always use a condom during sexual intercourse – even if they are using the patch. Patches do not protect against sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs). Although condoms are not 100% effective against STDs, their use significantly reduces the chances of passing a STD during intercourse. Only abstinence guarantees that a teen will not get a STD.

- Once they become sexually active, all young women should have routine testing for STDs, even if they don’t have symptoms. Pap smears may also be recommended.

- Birth control patches may not be as effective in preventing pregnancy if you weigh 198 pounds or more. If you are in this weight range, talk to your health care provider about other possible birth control options.

- When you do not change your patches at the appropriate times, there is no guarantee of good birth control. Starting a new package of patches even a day late can greatly increase the chances of pregnancy. It is even more important to use a condom for added protection against pregnancy when patch changes are late.

- After using patches for several months, some users may skip a period now and then. If you are sexually active and miss two periods in a row, you should get a pregnancy test.

- Although break-through bleeding can occur while taking the patch, be aware that pregnancy and STDs can also cause unexpected vaginal bleeding.