

Summary of the patch:

The weekly contraceptive patch delivers oestrogen and progestogen through the skin. Each patch is worn for 7 days, for 3 consecutive weeks, followed by a 4th patch free week.

What is it?

It is a small thin beige coloured patch about 5cm X 5cm in size. You stick it on your skin and it released 2 hormones. These are similar to the natural hormones that women produce in their ovaries. These are like those used in the combined pill. The one available in Ireland is called Evra.



How effective is the patch?

99% if used according to instruction, although it may not be so effective in women who weigh over 90kg (14 stone).

How does it work?

Hormones are released through the skin into the blood stream. This works in the same way as the combined pill. This works in the same way as the combined pill in that it stops egg release.

Is it suitable for everybody?

Not everyone can use it . Obviously you could not use it if you thought you were pregnant, if you smoke and are over 35, if you are 35 or over and have stopped smoking less than a year ago, or if you are overweight. You will not use it if you have diabetes, migraines, any past history of clotting or any past history of breast cancer within the last 5 years.

What are the advantages of it?

You don't have to think about it every day, you only have to think about it once a week. Obviously it doesn't interrupt sex and unlike the pill the hormones don't have to be absorbed by the stomach so it is not effected by diarrhoea or vomiting. It makes your bleeding less painful, lighter and more regular. It may reduce the risk of cancer of the ovary, womb and colon and it may reduce the risk of fibroids, ovarian cysts and breast disease which is not cancer.

What are the disadvantages of the patch?

It can be seen, it can cause skin irritation in some women, it does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections so you may need to use condoms as well. It may increase your blood pressure. You may get temporary side effects when you use it initially like headaches, nausea, breast tenderness, mood changes or breakthrough bleeding but these usually settle after some weeks.

Are there any risks with the patch?

The benefits for most women far outweigh any possible risks, although a very small number of women may develop a blood clot. The risk of this is greatest in the first year of using the patch if you are overweight or immobile for long periods, have severe varicose veins or if a member of your immediate family has had a clot before they were 45.

What about cancer?

Well current research suggests that all users of hormonal contraception appear to have a small increase in risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to non-users of hormonal contraception. Research also suggests that there is a small risk in the risk of cervical cancer when oestrogen and progestogen hormonal contraception is used continuously for more than 5 years.

What about weight gain?

There is no evidence that the patch increased weight gain. However some women may find that their weight changes throughout their cycle due to fluid retention.

When do you start the patch?

Any time in your menstrual cycle if you suspect that you are not pregnant. If you start on day 1 of your period you will be protected against pregnancy immediately. If you start the patch at any other time you will need to use another contraceptive method such as condoms for the next 7 days.

When do you start it after pregnancy?

Like the pill between day 21 and day 28 is the ideal time to start it. If you are breastfeeding you should not use the patch as it may dry up your milk.

Where do you put the patch?

Most areas of your body as long as your skin is clean, dry and not very hairy.

Are you protected from pregnancy during the 7 day break?

Yes you are if you have used the previous 3 patches correctly, if you start the patch cycle again on time and if you are not taking other medicines that will affect the patch like if you are given antibiotics in the first patch week. Caution needs to be used in women who take medicine for epilepsy, HIV and TB and the complimentary medicine St Johns Wort.