



**Patient Management: *Clinician Call Back System***

modification date:	June 14, 2013
content:	Frequently Asked Questions_ Combined Hormonal Contraceptives

**Overview**

This document details the most frequently asked questions by CHOICE participants regarding the combined hormonal contraceptive methods (birth control pills, transdermal patch, and vaginal ring) and provides an answer guide for staff. In this table, green represents questions which CHOICE receptionists were trained to answer, yellow represents questions which the CHOICE contraceptive counselors and staff nurse were trained to answer (in addition to the green questions), and red represents questions requiring a Clinician Call Back (CCB). The red level represents suggested responses and evidence based on the consensus of CHOICE clinicians. Refer to the [Clinician Call Back System Overview](#) for further information.

KEY: STAFF LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE	
	Receptionists
	Contraceptive Counselors, Staff Nurse
	Advanced Practitioners

<b><i>How effective is the pill/patch/ring at preventing pregnancy?</i></b>	These methods are all 91% effective with typical use, meaning that 9 out of 100 women using these methods will get pregnant during the first year of use. This is because they require the user to do something every day, every week, or every month.
<b><i>I just started my pill/patch/ring. How long do I need to use a condom for back up protection?</i></b>	You should use a back up method of birth control for a week after starting your method. Remember, these methods will not protect you from sexually transmitted infections, so you can continue to use condoms for protection from sexually transmitted infections.
<b><i>Should I wait until the Sunday after my next period to start the method?</i></b>	No, you can start the method today—this is called the Quick Start method. Remember to use a back up method of birth control, such as condoms, or not have sex for at least a week. You may experience some breakthrough bleeding but this is normal; just keep using the method as instructed.
<b><i>Can I take/use the pill/ring continuously in order to skip my period altogether?</i></b>	Yes, just skip the placebo week (the last week of the pill pack). Start a new pack of pills when you reach the week where you would normally start the placebo pills. With the ring, keep it in for four weeks, take it out, and immediately insert a new one. With the patch, skip the patch-free week and apply a new patch that week.

<p><b><i>I'm having a hard time remembering to take/use my pill/ patch/ring.</i></b></p>	<p>Some patients find it helpful to set an alarm on their cell phone. There are also some wonderful free apps that you can download to your smart phone. You can also visit <a href="http://www.bedsider.org">www.bedsider.org</a> to set up reminders that can be texted or emailed to you. If these strategies don't work and you continue to miss pills or take them late, the effectiveness will decrease. In this case, you may want to consider switching birth control methods.</p>
<p><b><i>What should I do if I miss a pill?</i></b></p>	<p>You should take the pill as soon as you remember and use a back up method for seven days. If you had sex and did not use a condom, you may want to consider taking emergency contraception.</p>

<p><b><i>How do I make sure I inserted my ring in the right way?</i></b></p>	<p>There is no perfect or correct way to insert your ring. Simply insert it into the back of your vagina where it is comfortable for you. Some women have found that using the applicator from a super tampon for the insertion is helpful. Just remove the tampon from the applicator, bend the ring and squeeze it into the applicator, and then insert into your vagina as you would a tampon.</p>
<p><b><i>How does the pill/patch/ring work to prevent me from getting pregnant?</i></b></p>	<p>These methods all contain the hormones estrogen and progesterone. They inhibit ovulation and thicken cervical mucous so the egg and sperm will not meet.</p>
<p><b><i>I was supposed to take my ring out last Sunday and did not take it out until today (Friday). When should I insert a new ring?</i></b></p>	<p>Go ahead and insert your new ring on your regular scheduled start date. You may experience a little bit of break through bleeding. This is normal and you should just keep your ring in.</p>
<p><b><i>I forgot to put my patch on after my "off" week. I started it the following week. Do I only use the 2 patches and then have a week off again?</i></b></p>	<p>Do your regular schedule (new patch on every week for three weeks and then off for one week). If you've already marked future start dates on your calendar remember to change these dates also. Make sure you use a back up method such as condoms for the first 7 days.</p>
<p><b><i>Can I swim or shower with the patch? What do I do if it falls off?</i></b></p>	<p>It is rare for the patch to fall off, even when swimming or showering. If it does fall off and is still sticky, just reapply it. If it is not sticky anymore, apply a new patch.</p>

<p><b><i>I don't want a method with hormones- I'm scared what they will do to my body.</i></b></p>	<p>Women's bodies create hormones naturally, so you always have hormones in your body. Methods like the pill, patch, and ring contain low levels of hormones so the side effects are generally minimal. Some women enjoy the benefits that having more stable hormonal levels can provide. The copper IUD is a highly effective option for women who do not want a hormonal method or who cannot have additional hormones for medical reasons.</p>
<p><b><i>I just started using the pill/patch/ring and my breasts are tender and I feel nauseous.</i></b></p>	<p>These side effects can be normal when first starting a method that has estrogen and progesterone. Usually these symptoms lessen after the first couple of months of use. If symptoms persist, you can talk to your healthcare provider.</p>
<p><b><i>I had sex last night. When I woke up this morning I found my ring mixed up in my sheets.</i></b></p>	<p>Just simply rinse the ring off with lukewarm water and reinsert it, and use a backup method of contraception or not have sex for 7 days. Some women find it helpful to always check the placement of their ring after sex. The ring can be out of the body for no more than 3 hours in a 24 hour period before it decreases in effectiveness.</p>

QUESTION	ANSWER	EVIDENCE BASE
<p><b><i>I heard that taking the pill will increase my risk of breast cancer.</i></b></p>	<p>Overall, studies have shown no association with COC use and risk for breast cancer.</p>	<p>COC use in a patient with current breast CA is a Cat. 4 on the US MEC for contraception. If pt. is a breast CA survivor for &gt;than five years with no current disease, it is a Cat. 3.</p>
<p><b><i>What kind of other health benefits does the pill/patch/ring provide?</i></b></p>	<p>There are many noncontraceptive benefits to the pill/patch/ring. They can provide menstrual cycle regularity which can help with heavy bleeding, menstrual pains, PMS or PMDD, ovarian cysts and the prevention of menstrual migraines. They are known to improve acne and abnormal hair growth on the face or chest. Pain from endometriosis can be reduced. There is even a decreased risk of some cancers, including endometrial, ovarian</p>	<p>The hormonal make-up of these methods provide for ovarian suppression which further enhances these non-contraceptive benefits.</p>

	and colon cancers.	
<b><i>I heard if I'm on antibiotics, it will make my method not work.</i></b>	Antibiotics do not affect the effectiveness of your method. Rifampin, used to treat tuberculosis, overrides the effectiveness of the pills/patch/ring, but unless you are taking Rifampin, it is safe to continue your method and take the antibiotics.	Hepatic enzyme inducers decrease COC effectiveness as it increases the COC clearance. These medications are used to treat tuberculosis and some MRSA skin infections. <sup>1</sup>
<b><i>Does St. John's Wort affect my pills/patch/ring?</i></b>	Yes, it can. It can decrease the effectiveness and cause more breakthrough bleeding. If you are taking St. John's Wort and using one of these methods, you may want to use back up contraception, such as condoms, or consider switching your method of birth control.	Use of St. John's Wort greatly increases hepatic metabolism of exogenous estrogen and progesterone, thus decreasing COC effectiveness. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hatcher, RA, Trussell, J, Nelson, AL, Cates, Jr. W, Kowal, D, Policar, MS. Contraceptive Technology, (20<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York(NY): Ardent Media, Inc.; 2011

<sup>2</sup> Hatcher, RA, Trussell, J, Nelson, AL, Cates, Jr. W, Kowal, D, Policar, MS. Contraceptive Technology, (20<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York(NY): Ardent Media, Inc.; 2011