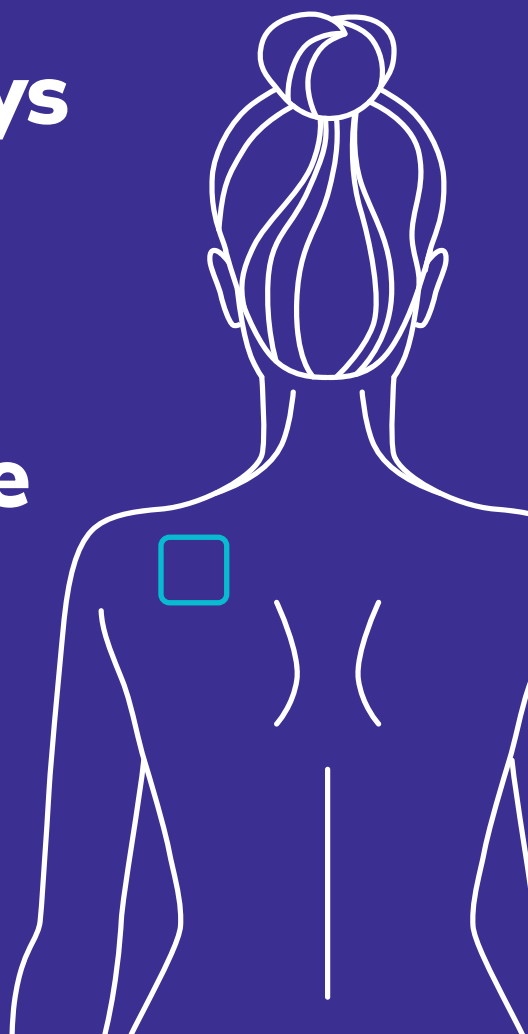


Did you know
there are
different ways
in which you
can use your
**combined
contraceptive
patch?**



Traditional or 'Standard' regimen

The combined contraceptive patch was originally designed and licensed to be used so women would have a regular bleed every 28-days, or 4 weeks.

This is called a hormone 'withdrawal bleed' which is similar to a natural period but can often be lighter and shorter. It happens because you have not reapplied a combined contraceptive patch for 7-days, during the fourth week of use. This is completely safe and you are still contraceptively protected during this fourth week.

A box of combined contraceptive patches contains enough patches for 3-months use (9 patches in total). Each individual clear-filmed pack contains three patches to be used over one month; reapplying a new patch every 7-days, once a week for 3-consecutive weeks. On the fourth week, when you do not reapply the patch for 7-days is when you may expect to bleed.

When applying a new patch, it is recommended to regularly change the site of patch application to avoid any localised skin concerns. The patch should be applied to clean, dry, lotion-free, healthy, hairless skin. Suitable patch sites are the upper outer arm, upper torso (excluding breasts), buttock, or lower abdomen in areas where it is unlikely to be rubbed by tight clothing. Pressing the patch down firmly for about 10 seconds will ensure all the edges stick well.

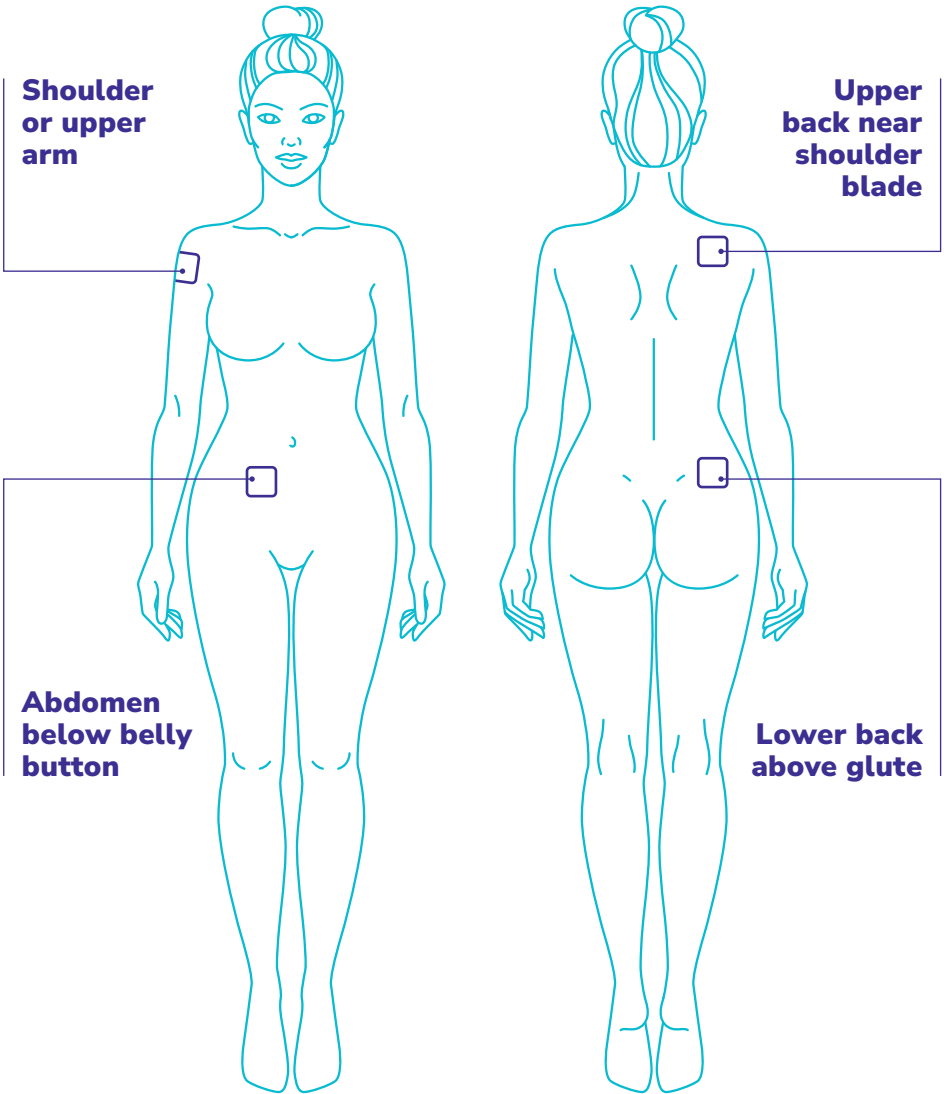


REMEMBER:

Only one patch should be worn at a time.

Here are some recommended body sites for applying the combined contraceptive patch.

Please avoid applying to breasts or near to the genital area.



How to use the combined contraceptive patch - **Standard** regimen

- ▶ Start on the first or second day of your period and no later than by day 5. Alternatively, you may be advised to start straight away. This is called 'quick starting' and only suitable if there is no pregnancy risk. If quick starting you will be advised to use additional precautions (condoms) for the first seven days.
- ▶ Apply your first patch as you have been instructed. Leave this patch on for seven days.
- ▶ On the 8th day, the same day of the week you applied your first patch one week ago, remove the old patch and reapply a new one, remembering to change the site of patch application.
- ▶ Safely dispose of any used patches in your general domestic waste.
- ▶ Change your patch weekly, on the same day of the week, for three consecutive weeks.
- ▶ On the 4th week, remove the patch and have a 7-day patch-free week. During this week without a patch expect to bleed. This is your 'withdrawal bleed'.
- ▶ Once you have had seven days without a patch, regardless if you may still be bleeding, reapply a new patch. Patch application will always be the same day of the week as when you applied your first and subsequent weekly patches.
- ▶ It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding with patch-use when you first start using the combined contraceptive patch. This should settle given time.
- ▶ If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding with patch-use after the first 3-months of using the combined contraceptive patch, or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding or bleeding after sex, or patch adhesion concerns then we advise you to discuss this with your contraception supplier. It may mean you need a sexual health check-up or may need to consider an alternative contraceptive method.



Standard regimen:

START



Day 1-5 of period



WEAR PATCH

7 days



CHANGE PATCH

7 days



CHANGE PATCH

7 days



BREAK

7 days



Shortened patch-free break or the 4-day break.

You can take a shortened patch-free break, i.e. taking just a 4-day break without a patch on instead of the usual 7-days

- ▶ Start on the first or second day of your period and no later than by day 5. Alternatively, you may be advised to start straight away. This is called 'quick starting' and only suitable if there is no pregnancy risk. If quick starting you will be advised to use additional precautions (condoms) for the first seven days.
- ▶ Apply your first patch as you have been instructed. Leave this patch on for seven days.
- ▶ On the 8th day, the same day of the week you applied your first patch one week ago, remove the old patch and reapply a new one, remembering to change the site of patch application.
- ▶ Safely dispose of any used patches in your general domestic waste.
- ▶ Change your patch weekly, on the same day of the week, for three consecutive weeks.
- ▶ On the 4th week, remove the patch and have a 4-day patch-free interval. During these four days without a patch you may bleed.
- ▶ Reducing your break to a 4-day patch-free interval can help with controlling periods or prevent them altogether.
- ▶ Once you have had 4-days without a patch, regardless if you may have bleeding, reapply a new patch. This will be on the 5th day after removing your old patch.



REMEMBER:
Only one patch
should be worn
at a time.



You might want to use an app or phone reminder to help you remember.

We know you will use up your patch supply more quickly with this and all the alternative patch-use regimens. Just remember to rebook your next appointment in time to collect more patches to avoid running out.

Shortened regimen:

START



Day 1-5 of period



WEAR PATCH

7 days



CHANGE PATCH

7 days



CHANGE PATCH

7 days



BREAK

4 days





Extended ‘Tricycling’ regimen

- ▶ With the extended ‘tricycling’ patch regimen you can use the 7-day, weekly patch change regimen continuously for nine weeks, ie without taking a patch-free break.
- ▶ After the nine continuous weeks of patch use, take either a 4-day or 7-day patch-free break, before reapplying a new patch on Day 5 or Day 8, depending on which length of break you choose.
- ▶ This is completely safe and you are still contraceptively protected during the patch-free break.
- ▶ By using the combined contraceptive patch this way it will reduce the number of bleeds you have, and is often helpful in alleviating some of the bothersome side effects eg hormone withdrawal headaches or painful bleeds, which some women may experience in their hormone-free (patch-free) break.



Tricycling regimen:

Week 1

WEAR PATCH

7 days



Week 2

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 3

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 4

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 5

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 6

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 4

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 8

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



Week 9

CHANGE PATCH

7 days



BREAK

4 days



-OR-

7 days





Choosing to take the combined contraceptive patch the continuous-taking way, also known as a **‘Tailored’** regimen

Choosing to use the combined contraceptive patch continuously (ie continuing with a 7-day, weekly patch change regimen with no patch-free breaks, is a safe option and one that many women may prefer.

This is because it gives women the power to choose when, or if, they have their bleed.

If you have a special event coming up, it's examination time or maybe you are planning to go camping, to the beach, or on holiday and you don't want to worry about getting any bleeding, this could be a great option for you and is safe to do.

For Continuous Patch Use the following is advised:

- ▶ You can use the combined contraceptive patch continuously, i.e. without ever taking a break, regardless if you bleed or not. The occasional bleed whilst using the combined contraceptive patch this way is not harmful and any bleeding should stop given time. This is known as Continuous patch use.

Alternatively, a more Flexible Extended Patch Regime can be used:

- ▶ If you prefer, if you get bleeding for 2 or more days in a row whilst using your combined contraceptive patch continuously you may take either a 4-day break or a 7-day break to have a bleed, this is as long as you have used the patch for at least 21-days, or 3-weeks continuously prior to this break.
- ▶ This is completely safe and you are still contraceptively protected during the patch free break. This is known as Flexible Extended patch use.
- ▶ During these four or seven days when you are not using a patch expect to continue to bleed. On either the 5th or 8th Day, depending on the length of break chosen, apply a new patch.
- ▶ If you are still bleeding when due to apply the new patch, do not worry, the bleeding should settle quickly once you are using your patch.
- ▶ If you get 2 days of bleeding in a row again, as long as you have used the patch for 21-days continuously, you can take a 4-day or 7-day break again.
- ▶ There must be at least 21-days of patch-use between these breaks.
- ▶ It is very common for women to start bleeding at some point during either flexible extended-use or continuous patch-use. For example, if you notice you are bleeding regularly during every sixth week of continuous patch use, you can arrange to take a planned break of either 4-days or 7-days before the time this normally happens. This way it should give you control over when the bleeding occurs.
- ▶ If you know you have a special event or holiday coming up and you don't want to be bleeding for it, again you can plan to take a timed 4-day or 7-day break before, so the bleed has finished before the event.
- ▶ This is, as long as the patch has been used for 21-days continuously prior to the break.
- ▶ It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding on patch-use days when you first start using the combined contraceptive patch. This should settle given time.
- ▶ If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding with patch-use after the first 3-months of using the combined contraceptive patch, or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding or bleeding after sex, or patch adhesion concerns then we advise you to discuss this with your contraception supplier. It may mean you need a sexual health check-up or may need to consider an alternative contraceptive method.

Commonly asked questions about the combined contraceptive patch method

Is it safe to use the patch other than the Standard Regimen?

Shortened break, tricycling, flexible extended and continuous patch-use regimens are what's known as an 'off-licence' prescription, as the combined contraceptive patch is being used in a different way to how it was originally licensed. Using the combined contraceptive patch any of these different ways is not harmful and supported nationally by the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) and internationally by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

What are the benefits of using the combined contraceptive patch this way?

Using the tricycling, flexible extended or continuous patch use regimens reduces the frequency of withdrawal bleeds and associated symptoms (eg headache or mood concerns).

These regimens could also be useful for women who have heavy or painful bleeding or problems associated with the hormone free (patch free) week.

Some women find it easier to remember to use the patch method these extended ways.

There is no build-up of menstrual blood inside a woman who uses the combined contraceptive patch for an extended time without taking a break, as extended patch-use helps keep the lining of the womb thin.

Using any of these different regimens for using the combined contraceptive patch does not affect the return of a woman's fertility when she stops the method.



REMEMBER:

**Only one patch
should be worn
at a time.**

Why is my patch not sticking?

The patch has been designed for safe use whilst performing everyday activities including bathing, sport and swimming. Normally it should not become detached unless purposefully being removed. Please ensure your patch is being applied to clean, dry, lotion-free, healthy, hairless skin. Suitable patch sites are the upper outer arm, upper torso (excluding breast), buttock, or lower abdomen, in areas where it is unlikely to be rubbed by tight clothing. Pressing the patch down firmly for about 10 seconds will ensure all the edges stick well. If you are having issues with patch adhesion please talk to your contraception provider.

Where to Go for Advice and Support



Visit our website for a list of local clinics and services.

 **eshs.org.uk**

 **0300 0003 1212**

Sexual Health Services are confidential, which means the information you share with us will be kept private. The only time information would be shared is if it was thought you, or someone else was at risk of harm, and information needed to be shared to keep people safe.

Alternatively, under 16s and those seeking more support can contact our help centre.

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