

Did you know there
are **different ways**
in which you can use
your **contraceptive**
vaginal ring?



The contraceptive vaginal ring is a soft, flexible hormonal contraceptive device inserted into the vagina, similar to inserting a tampon, and used to prevent pregnancy. Once the ring is in the right place it should not be felt, including during sex.

It works by releasing two hormones, oestrogen and progestogen, that prevent egg release, thicken cervical mucus, and thins the uterine lining, making it difficult for a fertilized egg to implant.

When used correctly the contraceptive vaginal ring is more than 99% effective.

If not used correctly, it's 91% effective, which means that about 9 in 100 women will get pregnant in a year. This is because things can go wrong, for example you might forget to reinsert a ring at the right time.

The contraceptive vaginal ring should not affect your fertility and once discontinued your fertility should return to previous levels after around 1-3 months.

Your contraception provider will have done a thorough health assessment to ensure it is safe to prescribe the contraceptive vaginal ring for you.



Traditional or 'Standard' regimen

The contraceptive vaginal ring 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.

One box of combined contraceptive vaginal rings contains enough rings for 3-months use (3 rings in total). Each ring comes individually packaged and is designed to be inserted in to the vagina and retained for 21-days or three continuous weeks. On the fourth week, the ring is removed for 7-days and this is your hormone-free break and you may expect to bleed. This is the Standard Regimen for using the contraceptive vaginal ring.

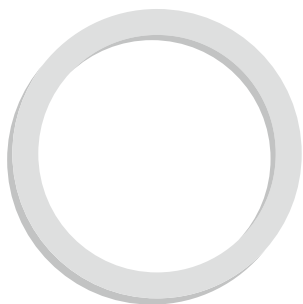
Always wash your hands before inserting or removing a contraceptive vaginal ring.



REMEMBER:

Only one vaginal ring should be worn at a time.

How to **insert** the contraceptive vaginal ring

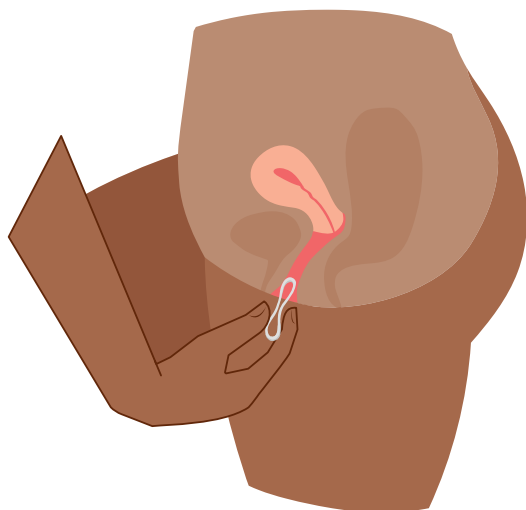
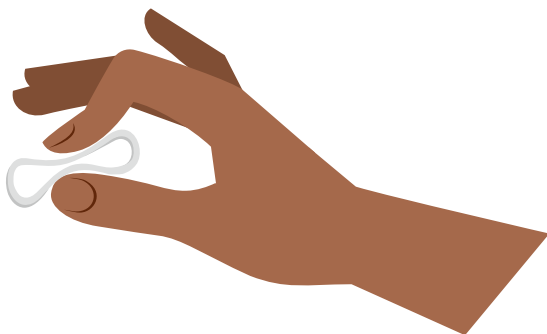


Remember:

- Always wash your hands before inserting or removing a contraceptive vaginal ring.
- The ring cannot get lost inside you
- Never flush or keep your ring when you are done - bin it!

1

Firstly, squeeze the ring between your thumb and index finger.

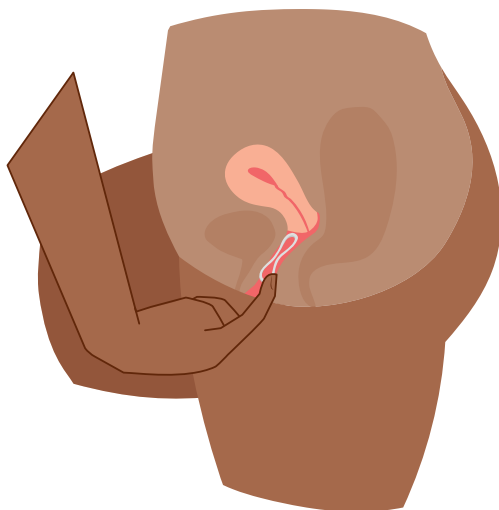


2

Then gently insert the tip into your vagina.

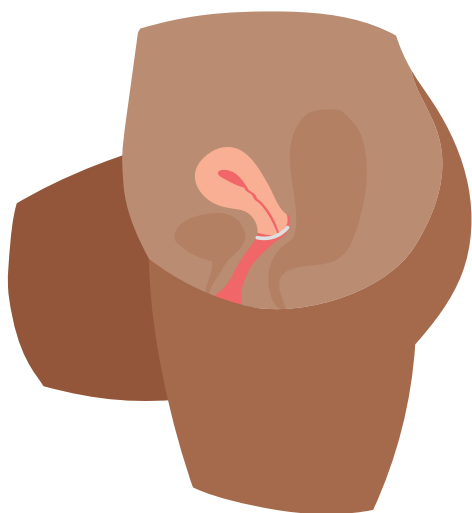
3

Slowly push the ring up into your vagina using your index finger until it feels comfortable.



4

Unlike a diaphragm or cap, the ring doesn't need to cover the entrance to your womb (the cervix) to work. If it feels uncomfortable you may not have pushed it far enough.



To remove the vaginal ring, insert a finger into your vagina and hook it around the edge of the ring to gently pull it out.

How to use the contraceptive vaginal ring - **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.
- ▶ Insert your first contraceptive vaginal ring as you have been instructed. Leave this ring in for 21-days.
- ▶ After 21-days remove the ring.
- ▶ Wrap the used ring in tissue paper before hygienically disposing of it in your general domestic waste. Do not flush a ring down the toilet.
- ▶ Once the ring has been removed take a 7-day break without a ring in.
- ▶ You will continue to be contraceptively protected throughout these 7-days.
- ▶ During these 7-days without a ring expect to bleed. This is your 'withdrawal bleed'.
- ▶ Once you have had 7-days without a ring, regardless if you may still be bleeding, reinsert a new ring.
- ▶ Do not exceed 7-days without a ring as you will not be contraceptively protected thereafter.
- ▶ **Remember:** When using the standard regimen your ring reinsertion day will always be the same day of the week as when you inserted your first ring, and will be the same for any subsequent ring insertions, thus making it easier to remember.
- ▶ It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding with ring-use when you first start using the contraceptive vaginal ring. This should settle given time.
- ▶ If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding with ring use after the first 3-months of using the contraceptive vaginal ring, or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding, bleeding after sex, or having any ring 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:

INSERT RING



21 days



BREAK

7 days



INSERT RING



21 days



BREAK

7 days



INSERT RING



21 days



BREAK

7 days



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

You can take a shortened ring-free break, ie taking just a 4-day break without a ring instead of the usual 7-days break.

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Insert your first contraceptive vaginal ring as you have been instructed. Leave this ring in for 21-days.
- ▶ After 21-days remove the ring.
- ▶ Wrap the used ring in tissue paper before hygienically dispose of it in your general domestic waste. Do not flush the ring down the toilet.
- ▶ Once the ring has been removed, have a shortened 4-day break without a ring in.
- ▶ You will continue to be contraceptively protected throughout these 4-days.
- ▶ During these 4-days without a ring expect to bleed. This is your 'withdrawal bleed'.
- ▶ Once you have had 4-days without a ring, regardless if you may still be bleeding, reinsert a new ring.
- ▶ When using the shortened ring-free 4-day break, the day of the week for ring insertion will change every time you inserted your new ring. Using a calendar reminder may help you remember when you need to insert your new ring.
- ▶ It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding with ring-use when you first start using the contraceptive vaginal ring. This should settle given time.
- ▶ If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding with ring use after the first 3-months of using the contraceptive vaginal ring, or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding, bleeding after sex, or having any ring 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.



Remember, using this shortened 4-day break regimen will change the day of the week you need to insert your new ring.



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

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

Shortened regimen:

INSERT RING



21 days



BREAK



INSERT RING



21 days



BREAK



INSERT RING



21 days



BREAK





Extended ‘Tricycling’ regimen

- ▶ With the extended ‘tricycling’ ring regimen you can use the contraceptive vaginal ring continuously for nine weeks, ie without taking a ring-free break.
- ▶ After every 21-days of ring-use remove the existing ring and replace it immediately with a new ring without taking a break.
- ▶ Do this for three consecutive 21-day rings, ie 3 rings used continuously for a total of 63 days.
- ▶ After the 63-days, or nine weeks of continuous ring-use, take either a 4-day or 7-day ring-free break, before reinserting a new ring on Day 5 or Day 8, depending on which length of break you choose.
- ▶ This is completely safe to do and you are still contraceptively protected during the ring-free break, as long as the break does not exceed 7-days.
- ▶ **Remember:** Wrap all used rings in tissue paper before hygienically disposing of them in your general domestic waste. Do not flush a ring down the toilet.

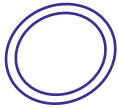
By using the contraceptive vaginal ring this way, it will reduce the number of bleeds you have, and is often helpful in alleviating some of the bothersome side effects eg hormone withdrawal headaches or painful bleeds, which some women experience in their hormone-free (ring-free) break.



Tricycling regimen:

Ring 1

INSERT RING

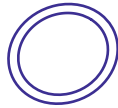


21 days



Ring 2

CHANGE RING

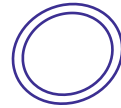


21 days



Ring 3

CHANGE RING



21 days



BREAK

4 days



-OR-

7 days



Ring 4

INSERT RING

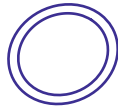


21 days



Ring 5

CHANGE RING

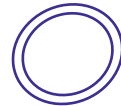


21 days



Ring 6

CHANGE RING



21 days





Choosing to use the contraceptive vaginal ring continuously is known as an extended or **'Tailored'** regimen

Choosing to use the contraceptive vaginal ring continuously (ie replacing rings one after another with no ring-free breaks at all 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 a 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 extended or continuous ring-use the following is advised:

- ▶ If you spot or bleed for 2 days in a row whilst using your contraceptive vaginal ring continuously, you may opt to take either a 4-day or a 7-day break to have a bleed, as long as you have used the ring for at least 21 days, or 3 weeks continuously prior to this break.
- ▶ This way of using the contraceptive vaginal ring is completely safe and you will still be contraceptively protected during the ring-free break.
- ▶ **Remember:** Wrap a used ring in tissue paper before hygienically disposing of it in your general domestic waste. Do not flush a ring down the toilet.
- ▶ During these four or seven days when you do not have a ring in, expect to continue to bleed.

- On either the 5th or 8th Day, depending on the length of break chosen, reinsert a new ring.
- If you are still spotting or bleeding when due to reinsert a new ring do not worry, the bleeding should settle quickly once you have your new ring in.
- If you get 2 days of bleeding in a row again, as long as you have used the ring for 21-days continuously, you can take a 4-day or 7-day break again.
- There must be at least 21-days of ring-use between these breaks.
- It is very common for women to start bleeding at some point during their extended or continuous ring-use.
- For example, if you notice you are bleeding regularly during every seventh week of continuous ring-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 spotting or bleeding occurs.
- Or, 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 ring has been used for 21-days continuously prior to the break.
- It is not unusual to experience some light spotting or irregular bleeding with a ring in situ when you first start using the contraceptive vaginal ring. This should settle given time.
- If you continue to experience frequent spotting or bleeding with ring use after the first 3-months of using the contraceptive vaginal ring, or you are finding you are getting unusual bleeding or bleeding after sex, or any ring concern 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.



REMEMBER:

Only one vaginal ring should be worn at a time.

Commonly asked questions about the contraceptive vaginal ring method

Is it safe to use the contraceptive vaginal ring other than the Standard Regimen?

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

What are the benefits of using the contraceptive vaginal ring this way?

Using the extended 'tricycling' or 'continuous' ring-use regimens reduces the frequency of withdrawal bleeds and associated symptoms (eg headache, nausea or mood concerns)

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

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

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

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



Will using the contraceptive vaginal ring affect my ability to get pregnant in the future?

The contraceptive vaginal ring is considered to be a very effective, low-dose combined hormonal contraception method when used correctly. There is no proven evidence using a contraceptive vaginal ring has any adverse effect on the return of your fertility and, when discontinued your fertility should return to previous levels after around 1-3 months.

The contraceptive vaginal ring does not stop you getting or passing on sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Use a condom every time you have sex to help protect you and your partner against STIs, including HIV.

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