

# Progesterone-Releasing Vaginal Ring

## Key Points for Providers and Clients

- **Suitable for postpartum women who are actively breastfeeding, at least 4 times per day.**
- **A woman places a flexible ring in her vagina.** She leaves it in place at all times, every day and night for 90 days. Four rings can be used, one after another, for approximately one year after giving birth.
- **Start each new ring immediately after removal of the previous ring for greatest effectiveness.**
- **Easy for a woman to insert and remove from her vagina.** If her reproductive plans change, she can take out the ring at any time without a provider's help.

## What Is the Progesterone-Releasing Vaginal Ring?

- A smooth, soft, flexible silicone ring placed in the vagina to prolong lactational amenorrhea (postponing the return of monthly bleeding) and help breastfeeding women space pregnancies.
- Continuously releases natural progesterone hormone—like that in a woman's body—from inside the ring. The hormone passes through the wall of the vagina directly into the bloodstream. This ring does not contain estrogen.
- Use of the ring starts 4 to 9 weeks after giving birth. Each ring is kept in place for 90 days. The woman can then replace it with a new ring immediately. Up to 4 rings can be used, one after another, with no breaks.



- Works by preventing release of an egg from the ovaries (ovulation). Progesterone extends the postpartum amenorrhea of the breastfeeding woman. That is, it delays the return of monthly bleeding.
- Safe and effective option for a woman:
  - Who has a baby at least 4 weeks old
  - Who is breastfeeding her baby at least 4 times per day and plans to continue breastfeeding
  - Whose monthly bleeding has not returned

## How Effective?

One or 2 pregnancies per 100 women using the progesterone-releasing vaginal ring for a year.

*Return of fertility after use is stopped:* No delay

*Protection against sexually transmitted infections:* None



## Side Effects, Health Benefits, and Health Risks

### Side Effects

Some users report the following:

- Spotting or irregular bleeding
- Low abdominal pain
- Breast pain
- Vaginal discharge

### Known Health Benefits and Health Risks

- No change in breast milk production or composition; the method supports continued breastfeeding and healthy infant nutrition.
- Safe and effective, based on several 1-year studies. Its health risks may be like those of progestin-only pills (see Chapter 2 – Progestin-Only Pills, section on Side Effects, Health Benefits, and Health Risks, p. 31).
- Women who are actively breastfeeding and are at least 4 weeks postpartum can safely use the progesterone-releasing vaginal ring (MEC Category 1).

# Providing the Progesterone-Releasing Vaginal Ring

## Explain How to Use

### Explain how to insert the ring

- The user can choose the position most comfortable for her—for example, standing with one leg up, squatting, or lying down.
- She should press opposite sides of the ring together and, with her index finger, gently push the ring entirely inside the vagina as far as she can (see picture 1). It can help to push down with the muscles of the vagina while inserting the ring.



- The exact position of the ring in the vagina is not important, but inserting it deeply helps it to stay in place (see picture 2), and the user is less likely to feel it. The muscles of the vagina naturally keep the ring in place.



- She should not feel the ring after she places it into her vagina. If she feels the ring in her vagina, she has a sensation of it slipping, or it feels uncomfortable, she may not have pushed it back into her vagina far enough. Instruct her to use a clean finger to gently push the ring as far as she can into her vagina. There is no danger of the ring being pushed too far up in the vagina, breaking during insertion, or getting lost.

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**Explain that the ring must be left in for 90 days**

- She should keep the ring in place at all times to maintain effectiveness.
- To continue avoiding pregnancy, the user can take the ring out at the end of the 90 days and replace it immediately with a new ring. She can use 4 rings, for up to one year of use in the postpartum period.
- The ring can be disposed of in a waste receptacle. Disposing of the ring in a flush toilet is not recommended.

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**The ring should never be left out for more than 2 hours**

- The ring should be left in place always. Some women may remove the ring for sex or for cleaning, but this is not necessary and not recommended because some women forget to put it back within 2 hours.
- If the ring slips out completely, she should rinse it in clean water and immediately put it back in place.

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**Explain that her partner may be able to feel the ring**

- This generally does not interfere with sex or decrease sexual pleasure.
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## Supporting New and Continuing Users

### *Instructions for Replacement or Switching*

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**Left the ring out for more than 2 hours**

- Put the ring back in the vagina as soon as possible. Contact your health care provider to discuss any concerns.

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**Left the ring out for more than 24 hours**

- Put the ring back in as soon as possible. Use a condom if you have sex in the next 48 hours. Contact your health care provider to discuss any concerns.

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**Feel the ring slipping**

- Use a clean finger to push the ring up as far into the vagina as possible.

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**After 1 year of use or if no longer breastfeeding at least 4 times per day**

- For longer birth spacing, she can plan ahead to switch to another family planning method. At least 2 years between giving birth and the next pregnancy is healthy for both mother and child.
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