

SGGG leaflet on the risk of blood clots with hormonal contraceptives (to give to patients)

1. Starting contraception with combined hormonal contraceptives

Before you start to use hormonal contraceptives, your doctor should take a careful personal and family medical history (noting diseases you have had in the past and diseases in your family) and should perform a thorough physical examination, usually including a gynaecological examination (except in young first-time users). Pregnancy must be ruled out. Smoking significantly increases the risk of "the Pill". During contraceptive use, medical check-ups are recommended once a year, or about every six months if there are risk factors.

2. Side effects of contraception with combined hormonal contraceptives, especially the effect on blood clotting and risk of vascular (blood vessel) disease

In women who use combined hormonal contraceptives (the classic "Pill", patches, vaginal ring), that is, a contraceptive containing an oestrogen and a gestagen, there is a slightly increased risk of blood clotting in veins and arteries (venous and arterial thromboembolic disease), which can sometimes lead to severe damage to health. The risk of blood clots is greatest during the first year of use. A blood clot in veins can lead to deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism and in arteries to stroke or heart attack. The risk of such thrombosis or embolism is present with all combined hormonal contraceptives (the pill, patches, vaginal rings) but is much lower than the risk during pregnancy.

Rare cases of blood clots in the eyes (retinal thrombosis) or other organs have been reported. However, an association with taking oral contraceptives has not been proven.

The risk of blood clots in veins or arteries or of other serious side effects is increased by:

- Increasing age
- Smoking: the risk of circulation disorders in the heart or brain (heart attack/stroke) increases in heavy smokers together with increasing age. Therefore, you should not smoke, especially if you are over 35 years old. You should always inform your doctor of your smoking habits.
- Previous occurrence of a vein thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, heart attack or stroke in a sibling or parent
- Blood clotting disorders
- Being considerably overweight (your doctor will inform you about this)
- Disorders of lipid metabolism (fats in the blood)
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure (especially high blood pressure that is difficult to control)
- Migraine
- Certain heart diseases (heart valve diseases, atrial fibrillation)
- Confinement to bed or impaired mobility after an accident or operation
- A broken leg or surgery on a leg
- Long air or bus journeys
- Diseases of the liver and gallbladder

3. If there are possible signs of a blood clot or the following symptoms occur, you should stop using hormonal contraceptives and consult your doctor

- Migraine (especially with an aura) or unusually severe headaches, which you formerly did not have or did not have as frequently/regularly
- Sudden disorders of vision, hearing, speech or other forms of perception
- Unexplained leg pain with or without swelling, especially on only one side
- Sudden shortness of breath or sudden onset of cough without an obvious cause
- Sudden severe pain in the chest with or without radiation to the left arm
- Sudden onset of dizziness, weakness, disorders of sensation or disorders of coordination
- Collapse with or without seizures

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