

SGGG Information sheet for users of combined hormonal contraceptives (updated 6/2013)

Authors: G.S. Merki-Feld, J. Bitzer, J. Seydoux, M. Birkhäuser.

Combined hormonal contraceptives protect very effectively against pregnancy. They contain two types of hormones, an oestrogen and a corpus luteum hormone. Today, an entire range of combinations of different oestrogens and corpus luteum hormones is available. They can be used as a pill, vaginal ring or patch. Very rarely, severe complications can occur due to use of these hormones, for example venous thrombosis or pulmonary embolism.

Some contraceptives have a lower risk than others (see below).

To reduce the risk of such an event, your doctor will question you in detail about certain risk factors. The risk rises with increasing age (> 35 years), smoking, the occurrence of blood clots in a blood vessel in a family member, overweight, raised blood lipids, diabetes, high blood pressure, migraine, valvular heart disease, situations involving prolonged confinement to bed or in association with surgery.

If you have risk factors, your doctor must clarify precisely whether a combined contraceptive can be prescribed for you.

As a user, you can reduce your risk of a thromboembolic event or pulmonary embolism yourself, for example, by not smoking and ensuring that your weight is within the normal range. An annual medical check-up is recommended while using hormonal contraceptives.

Harmless side effects (see below) can also occur in the first weeks of taking the pill. These usually resolve spontaneously. If this is not the case, switching to a different contraceptive preparation may be helpful.

- The contraceptive preparations available on the market differ slightly with regard to the risk of a blood clot associated with use depending on the corpus luteum hormone (progestogen) in the contraceptive preparation. Discussion of these differences is part of the counselling interview your doctor will hold with you. According to current knowledge, preparations with the progestogen levonorgestrel have the lowest risk.
- Please read the patient information leaflet in the medication pack.

Serious side effects of combined hormonal contraceptives (CHC):

When using a contraceptive with an oestrogen and a progestogen there is a slightly increased risk of blood vessel blockage in veins or arteries (thrombosis or embolism). This leads very rarely to severe injury to health or even death. The risk for such a complication is highest during the first year of use. To avoid complications of such a thrombosis as far as possible, it is important to recognise these events promptly and consult a doctor immediately if suspicious symptoms occur. Therefore, please be aware of the possible symptoms listed below and contact a doctor immediately if these occur.

Typical symptoms of venous or arterial blood vessel blockage:

- **Deep vein thrombosis:**
One-sided swelling of the leg or along a vein of the leg, a feeling of tightness or pain in one leg, even if this is felt only when standing or walking, increased heat, redness or discolouration of the skin at the site in question.
- **Pulmonary embolism:**
Sudden unexplained shortness of breath, rapid breathing or breathlessness.
Sudden onset of cough, possibly with bloody sputum.
Sudden severe pain in the chest, which can increase with taking a deep breath.
Severe drowsiness, dizziness or a feeling of anxiety.
Very rapid heart beat or irregular heart beat.
- **Stroke:**
Sudden deafness, disturbance of sensation or loss of power on one side in the face, arm or leg,
Sudden confusion.
Indistinct speech or problems with understanding.
Sudden visual disturbance in one or both eyes.
Sudden disturbance of walking, dizziness.
Sudden severe or more prolonged headaches of unknown cause
Loss of consciousness or fainting with and without a seizure.
- **Other symptoms of a thrombosis can be:**
Severe pain or bluish discolouration of an arm or leg.
Sudden severe abdominal pain

If you have the following symptoms, you should immediately stop taking the pill and contact your doctor:

- **New onset of migraine or unusually severe headaches.**
- **Sudden breathing complaints or sudden onset of cough of unclear cause.**
- **Unexplained leg pains with or without swelling.**
- **Sudden disturbance of vision, hearing, speech or other form of perception.**
- **Sudden severe pain in the upper abdomen or chest with or without radiation to the arm.**
- **Sudden onset of dizziness, feelings of weakness, disorders of sensation.**
- **Collapse with or without seizures.**

Harmless side effects often resolve spontaneously or can be modified by a change of preparation

- Breast tension
- Breakthrough bleeding
- Changes in mood or libido
- Mild headaches
- Changes in appetite or weight.