



Contraception Information

Migraines and Combined Hormonal Contraceptives

Migraine and Contraception

- Many people suffer with headaches and migraines
- Different methods of contraception can have different effects on headaches and migraines
- Some methods of contraception may be unsafe to use for women with a certain type of migraine

Is it a migraine?

Migraines are typically:

- One-sided, which may be throbbing
- Associated with sensitivity to light and sound
- Associated with nausea and vomiting
- No symptoms between attacks
- It is common to get some blurring of vision during the migraine headache but these symptoms are not aura

Have I ever had a migraine with aura?

An aura is a symptom which usually:

- Starts before the migraine headache
- Lasts up to one hour
- Resolves before the migraine headache develops

The following symptoms may occur as an aura:

- Zig-zag flashing lights at the edge of your vision
- Tunnel vision (loss of peripheral vision, like looking through a tube)
- Inability to see half the field of vision
- Pins and needles/numbness down one side on the body (could be leg, arm, face, tongue)
- Difficulty finding the right words

Taking Combined Hormonal Contraception (CHC) if you suffer with migraines

There are three types of CHC:

- The combined Pill
- The Patch
- The Vaginal ring

Women who take a CHC have a slightly increased risk of having a stroke.

This risk is increased further in women who suffer migraines with aura and use CHC.

How great is the risk?

- In 100,000 women under the age of 35 who are not using a CHC and do not suffer with migraines; one will have a stroke per year.

- In 100,000 women under the age of 35 who are using a CHC, but do not have migraines; five will have a stroke per year.
- In 100,000 women under the age of 35 who are using a CHC and get migraines with aura; 28 will have a stroke per year.

Number of women under 35	Not on contraception	On CHC	No migraines	Migraine with aura	Strokes per year
100,000					1
100,000					5
100,000					28

This means that it is an unacceptable risk to take any CHC if you suffer from migraines with aura

Other factors that cause an increased risk of stroke are:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- High blood pressure
- Increasing age

The following recommendations are made concerning CHC and migraine:

- If you get a migraine with aura you should not take CHC as the risks are greater than the benefits.
- If you have had a migraine with aura in the past (over five years ago) the risk of taking the CHC probably still outweighs the benefits. You should discuss this with a specialist as CHC is not recommended unless other methods are not available or acceptable.
- If you get migraine without aura it may be ok to start taking the CHC, but this will depend on other risk factors such as age and BMI.
- If you get your first ever migraine (without aura) after starting a CHC, you should discuss this with a specialist as the risk of continuing CHC probably outweigh the benefits.
- If you get your first ever migraine with aura after starting the CHC, you should not take CHC as the risks are greater than the benefits.

There are many alternative methods of contraception available that can be safely used even if you get migraines which you can ask your school health/college nurse about.

Notes

Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on freephone: 0800 328 7971.

Please contact us if you would like the information in another language or different format.

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