

Patient Name (Please Print): _____

Combined Oral Contraceptive Pills FACT SHEET

Combined oral contraceptive pills (OCP's) are a form of daily birth control. The pills contain two naturally-occurring hormones, an estrogen and a progestin. There are many different types of OCP's available, each with slightly different types of hormones and hormone concentrations.

OCP's work to prevent pregnancy by preventing the egg from being released from the ovary, and also by changing the cervical mucous to prevent sperm from reaching an egg.

OCP's must be taken every day, at the same time each day, to work properly. If they are taken correctly, they are 99% effective at preventing pregnancy. However, most women do not take their pills perfectly. OCP's are less effective when not taken perfectly, and women may have an unintended pregnancy if a pill is missed or even taken late. For the typical woman using OCP's, they are 91% effective at preventing pregnancy (9 pregnancies in 100 women using OCP's for a year).

OCP's do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms are the best way for sexually active people to reduce the risk of infection. Always use a condom if you or your partner has other sex partners.

Advantages of OCP's:

- Decreased pain with periods and/or lighter menstrual periods
- Nothing to do right before sex (to prevent pregnancy)
- May improve PMS (premenstrual syndrome) symptoms
- Can decrease risk of uterine (endometrial) and ovarian cancer
- Ability to become pregnant returns quickly when you stop taking OCP's

Disadvantages of OCP's:

- Must take a pill every day, at the same time each day
- Less effective (higher risk of pregnancy) if pills are not taken properly
- Can be associated with some risks (see below)
- Side effects – OCP's are generally well-tolerated, but some women experience side effects such as breast tenderness, nausea or change in mood or libido. Most of these symptoms improve with time.
- OCP's may interact with certain epilepsy (anti-seizure) or anti-retroviral medications.

Risks of using OCP's:

- **Venous thromboembolism** – very rarely, a blood clot can develop in the veins of the legs (DVT) or in the lungs (PE). These conditions can be life-threatening. Use of OCP's increases the chance of developing a DVT or PE slightly. The risk of having a DVT or PE while taking OCP's is approximately 1: 5,000 – 10,000.
- **Stroke or heart attack** – very rarely, younger women can have a stroke or heart attack. Use of OCP's can increase the chance of this happening slightly if you also have other risk factors (such as high blood pressure, smoking or a certain type of migraine headaches).
- **High blood pressure** – OCP's can slightly increase your blood pressure. For most women, this increase is small and does not affect your health.

Contraindications- OCP's can not be used by women who:

- Smoke and are older than 35 years
- Have uncontrolled high blood pressure (hypertension)
- Have certain types of migraine headaches
- Have a history of blood clot (DVT or PE), or if you or a family member have certain blood disorders which can increase the risk for DVT or PE
- Have a history of breast cancer
- Have a history of stroke or heart disease
- Have severe diabetes (with neurological or kidney problems)
- Have recently given birth (within 3 weeks)

Tell your clinician if you have any of these risk factors or conditions, or of any other past or current medical problems or concerns. Your clinician will evaluate your history to help you decide if OCPs are the correct choice for you.

Warning signs – Call your health care provider right away if you:

- Miss a menstrual period, or are late in starting your menstrual period
- Think you are pregnant
- Have been, or might have been, exposed to a sexually transmitted infection
- Have unusual pain or swelling in the legs, unusual pain in your chest, or difficulty breathing (go directly to an emergency room)
- Have sudden change in vision, severe headache, weakness, numbness or difficulty speaking (go directly to an emergency room)
- Have new or worsening headaches
- Have depression or change in mood

Regular physical examinations for routine health care, STI and cancer screening are strongly recommended.

Patient Signature: _____ Date: _____

Clinician Signature: _____ Date: _____