



Contraceptives provide lifelong benefits and reduce chronic disease

Overview and Background

Hormonal contraceptives are intended to prevent pregnancy. Many people don't know they also offer a number of health benefits, including moderating or reducing chronic disease. Health benefits may be both immediate and ongoing. Those who benefit include: the woman, her family, employers, and society by reduced absenteeism and health care costs and improved birth outcomes and maternal health.

The International Business Times published results of a study reporting what women see as the benefits from using contraception. "The results confirm what most people, in this day and age, already believe: Women use contraception because it ultimately allows them to better care for their families, complete their education and achieve economic autonomy"¹. Providing stage-of-life-appropriate reproductive life planning within the context of health promotion is critical because the reproductive capacity of most women spans more than 30 years.

Immediate Benefits

Immediate potential noncontraceptive benefits of hormonal contraceptives include:

- Menstrual regulation or eliminating menses.
- Reducing heavy menses, including associated anemia.
- Treating menstrual pain.
- Treating premenstrual syndrome and depression.
- Preventing menstrual migraines.
- Treating acne or hirsutism.
- Treating chronic endometriosis and associated pelvic pain.
- Treating excessive bleeding due to benign uterine tumors, making it possible for some women to avoid surgery.
- Controlling perimenopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and other symptoms of hormonal fluctuation.

Hormonal contraceptive users, especially younger users, often cite one or more of these reasons for using their contraceptive.

Long-term Benefits

Long-term protective benefits also accrue, some of them after as little as five years of hormonal contraceptive use:

- Protective effect against several cancers (endometrial, ovarian, colorectal) extending as much as 20 years after stopping contraceptive use.
- Decreased benign breast lumps – cysts and fibrous lumps that lead to unnecessary biopsies and other procedures. Contraceptives have not been shown to cause breast cancer.

- Treating polycystic ovary syndrome thereby reducing long-term complications of obesity, diabetes, dyslipidemia, and heart disease.
- Estrogen-containing contraceptive products improve bone mineral density.

Help for Chronic Problems

Some contraceptive formulations can immediately help certain specific chronic problems:

- Depo-Provera can reduce menstrual exacerbations of seizure activity, porphyria, and asthma.
- Depo-Provera reduces the frequency of painful sickle cell crises by 50 percent.
- Research with combined hormonal contraception or hormone replacement therapy shows promise for multiple positive effects on the course of autoimmune encephalomyelitis, a widely used multiple sclerosis disease model.
- Contraception has a positive effect on the course of chronic diseases and quality of life for women with serious medical conditions like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

For More Information:

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