

Sample press release

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Oral Contraceptives and Weight Gain

Updated research review still finds no evidence that oral contraceptives cause weight gain

Research Triangle Park, NC—Many women stop using oral contraceptives early or never start using them because of concerns about gaining weight. But an updated review of studies examining the relationship between hormonal contraceptive use and weight change continues to find no evidence that contraceptive pills increase weight.

This review, published in the latest issue of the Cochrane Library, includes two additional studies beyond those originally reviewed by researchers at Family Health International (FHI) and published in 2003 in the Cochrane Library. In total, 44 hormonal contraceptive trials containing information about study participants' weight changes—the majority of which addressed oral contraceptive use—have now been examined.

One strength of the review, which was an exhaustive search of the scientific literature on this topic, was that it was limited to randomized controlled trials, the “gold standard” of trial designs for reducing the potential for bias.

Three of the trials compared weight changes in women taking oral contraceptives versus weight changes in women taking placebos. None of the three showed an association between oral contraceptives and weight gain. The remaining trials that considered oral contraceptive use compared weight changes between women taking different oral contraceptive regimens. While some women gained weight and some lost weight over time, overall differences between groups were minimal. The largest difference in weight change between groups was less than five pounds.

“In comparing different combination contraceptives, you would expect differences between groups if the estrogen or progestin in the pills or the type of pill was causing weight gain,” says FHI researcher and review coauthor Laureen Lopez. “But we did not see any major differences between groups taking different types of pills,” she says.

Combined oral contraceptives are the most common form of contraception in the United States and are used by more than 100 million women worldwide. If taken correctly and consistently, they are more than 99 percent effective at preventing pregnancy. Under typical use, they are less effective.

Studying the association between oral contraceptives and weight gain has been difficult for multiple reasons, including the facts that many different oral contraceptive regimens exist and some women gain weight over time regardless of whether they use contraception. “It is very reassuring news,” says coauthor Dr. David Grimes of FHI. “A widely held myth suggests that oral contraceptives cause weight gain, but the answer as best we can tell is they do not,” he says.

The Cochrane Library is an electronic database of the Cochrane Collaboration, an international organization committed to helping people make informed health care decisions by preparing, maintaining, and promoting systematic reviews of the effects of health care interventions. Family Health International contributes to the Cochrane Collaboration by producing reviews of randomized clinical trials of contraceptive methods. For more information on the Cochrane Collaboration, see <http://www.cochrane.org/>. To learn more about Family Health International, see <http://www.fhi.org/>.

Source

Gallo MF, Lopez LM, Grimes DA, Schulz KF, Helmerhorst FM. Combination contraceptives: effects on weight (Cochrane Review). In: The Cochrane Library, Issue 1. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2006.

Family Health International is dedicated to improving lives, knowledge, and understanding worldwide through a highly diversified program of research, education, and services in family health and HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Since its inception in 1971, FHI has formed partnerships with national governments and local communities in countries throughout the developing world to support lasting improvements in the health of individuals and the effectiveness of entire health systems.