

Effects of a low dose oral contraceptive on body weight in young women

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Objective: Weight gain is often assumed to be a possible side effect of oral contraceptive (OC) use, especially among young women. Therefore, a study was performed to assess the effect of a low dose OC containing 20µg ethinylestradiol and 150µg desogestrel (20EE/150DSG) on body weight and blood pressure in young women.

Design & Methods: Sixty female volunteers aged 15 to 25 years, all starters, were included in this open-label, non-randomized clinical trial. All women received 20EE/150DSG (Mercilon®) for 21 days followed by 7 pill-free days. Monthly visits were made by each woman to her gynecologist for assessment of body weight and blood pressure over 6 treatment cycles.

Results: Four women discontinued 20EE/150DSG prematurely. Most of the changes in body weight during the first 3 months of OC use (82.0% of the women showed either a small decrease or increase), had stabilized at treatment month 6, where 18.3% experienced a decrease in body weight and 10.0% experienced an increase in body weight. The OC had an adjusting effect on body weight: women who were underweight experienced a weight increase (mean 2.5 ± 1.0 kg) and patients who were overweight experienced a weight decrease (mean -1.5 ± 0.5 kg). Most of the women (99.6%) did not experience any change in blood pressure. In addition, some positive non-contraceptive effects were observed during OC use, including normalization of menstrual cycle (39.3%), improvement of dysmenorrhea (30.4%) and improvement of skin condition (92.0%).

Conclusions: Mercilon has a neutral effect on body weight and no effect on blood pressure. Absence of androgen-related side effects together with good tolerability makes Mercilon® a good choice for starters.