

## ***Additional Health Benefits of Oral Contraceptives***

In addition to its intended use-protection against unwanted pregnancy-the oral contraceptive (OC), or “the pill,” may be beneficial to your health in a number of ways. Also, the benefits of OC use apply to women from the time they begin to menstruate until they reach menopause. These benefits can have long-term impact even after pill use is stopped.

### **What additional health benefits can OCs provide?**

The additional health benefits OCs may provide include reduced risk of:

- Endometrial cancer
- Ovarian cancer
- Ovarian cysts
- Fibrocystic breast disease
- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Iron deficiency anemia
- Menstrual cycle irregularities

### **Reduced risk of endometrial and ovarian cancer**

Protection against endometrial cancer (cancer of the uterus) and ovarian cancer is probably one of the most important additional health benefits of OCs. Using the pill for 1 year or more considerably reduces the risk of developing endometrial cancer. The risk of developing ovarian cancer is reduced with only 3 to 6 months of OC use. Protection against these cancers increases as the length of time OCs are taken increases and can continue for at least 15 years after pill use is stopped.

### **Reduced risk of ovarian cysts**

An ovarian cyst is a fluid-filled growth that can develop in an ovary during ovulation (the release of an egg from an ovary). The risk of developing ovarian cysts is greatly reduced for OC users because the pill helps prevent ovulation.

### **Reduced risk of Fibrocystic breast disease**

Fibrocystic breast disease is a condition in which the milk-producing glands in the breast become thick and form non cancerous breast lumps. This condition is less common in OC users than in nonusers. The risk of developing this disease decreases as the length of time OCs are taken increases.

### **Reduced risk of PID**

Oral contraceptives have been found to reduce the incidence of PID, a serious bacterial infection of the reproductive organs that can cause intense pain. The pill thickens cervical mucus, which acts as a barrier that prevents bacteria from entering the uterus, thereby lessening the risk of PID infections. If PID goes untreated, it can damage the reproductive organs and lead to infertility.

## ***Additional Health Benefits of Oral Contraceptives (continued)***

### **Reduced risk of ectopic pregnancy**

An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilized egg develops outside the uterus. This condition is sometimes caused by infections associated with PID. By reducing the risk of PID, OCs also reduce the risk of ectopic pregnancy. In fact, OCs reduce the risk by at least 90% in current users. The incidence of ectopic pregnancy in women no longer using the pill is also reduced, since their risk of developing PID was reduced during the time they used OCs.

### **Reduced risk of iron deficiency anemia**

Iron deficiency anemia is a condition in which the levels of iron in red blood cells in circulation are low. It can be caused by heavy menstrual flow and can result in loss of energy and strength. The use of OCs reduces menstrual flow. Therefore, the chance of having iron deficiency anemia, and the associated loss of energy and strength caused by loss of menstrual blood, is lower for OC users than is for nonusers.

### **Prevention of other menstrual cycle irregularities**

- Menorrhagia (heavy menstrual bleeding) and irregular menstrual bleeding. The use of OCs tends to reduce blood flow and establish more regular periods. This is particularly important for women nearing menopause, a time when the amount of bleeding and frequency of periods become more erratic.
- Dysmenorrhea (menstrual cramps). The use of OCs helps to reduce the pain and cramping that some women experience during their periods. As a result, you may avoid loss of time from work, school, or recreational activities.