



## CEDARS-SINAI MEDICAL CENTER.

### **BIRTH CONTROL PILLS FOR THE TREATMENT OF EXCESS MALE HORMONE DISORDERS, INCLUDING HIRSUTISM AND THE POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME**

Birth Control Pills, (BCPs), are also called Oral Contraceptive Pills. They are usually given to stop pregnancy. However, BCPs can also be used for other reasons. They include treating endometriosis, pelvic pain, and irregular periods. BCPs are also used to decrease the level of male hormones in your blood. Those hormones come from the ovaries. They help in the treatment of disorders caused by too many male hormones. Hirsutism and the Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) are examples.

BCPs work by lowering the levels of the hormones FSH and LH made by the pituitary. The pituitary is a small hormone-producing gland located behind your eyes, at the base of the brain. The ovaries need LH and FSH to produce female (estrogens) and male (androgens) hormones. Hirsutism is excessive body hair found in women that is similar to that of men. It is usually due to the over production of androgens by the ovaries. A common disorder that causes excess production of male hormones by the ovary is PCOS. BCPs act to decrease FSH and LH. This reduces the production of androgens by the ovaries.

Treatment with BCPs is usually continued for at least two years and then re-evaluated. However, the use BCPs alone to decrease the production of male hormones and to regulate the menstrual cycles, has only a modest beneficial effect on excess hair growth. If hirsutism is significant your doctor will usually add an anti-male hormone (anti-androgen) to your treatment. Examples of anti-androgens are spironolactone, flutamide, and finasteride. BCPs can be combined with these medications to treat hirsutism. This is at the discretion of your doctor.

It is important to remember to take your pills at about the same time each day. Begin your pill-pack on the Sunday following the beginning of your period. Begin even if you are still bleeding. If your period begins on a Sunday, begin the pills that same day. During the first month of taking the BCPs, it will be necessary to use extra birth control. You can use a condom and foam, or diaphragm.

When taking BCPs, it is not unusual to have "breakthrough" bleeding. This can be irregular dark brown to reddish spotting. This spotting usually does not occur after the third pack of pills. However, it can occur in some women who take BCPs for years. This is easily corrected by changing the hormone regimen.

#### **RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS**

BCPs can be used to reduce the level of the male hormones circulating in your blood. These hormones come from the ovaries. They also are working as a form of birth



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control. They help to prevent getting pregnant. The following are side-effects of the pill. They are not usually a cause for alarm:

- Two to 3 pound weight gain
- Break-through bleeding
- Mild to medium nausea (which goes away within the first 2 months),
- Mild headaches (which go away within the first 2 months)

Severe problems occur rarely with the lower doses BCPs. They happen in approximately 2 in every 5,000 to 10,000 women who do not smoke. Severe complications include:

- Heart attacks
- Clots in the brain (stroke) or lungs (pulmonary embolism)
- Benign tumors of the liver (which can occasionally rupture)
- High blood pressure

Women who smoke and over 35 years of age are at greater risk for developing these problems. Women over 35 years of age can use the lower dose of BCPs. This will not result in a major increase in risks if they are healthy and do not smoke.