

Birth Control Methods and Migraine Headache

Women who are considering starting a birth control method should be aware of the risks associated with estrogen-containing contraceptive methods [most birth control pills, Lunelle, Evra (the patch), and Nuvaring (the ring)]. The estrogen component of the pill raises your risk for blood clots. Blood clots most often occur in the legs, but occasionally blood clots can cause heart attacks or strokes.

Strokes (brain injury that can be permanent) are rare in women of reproductive age: about 4 to 5 strokes per 100,000 women ages 20-44 per year. However, women with a personal history of migraine headaches, or a family history of migraine headaches are at higher risk for stroke. This increased risk of stroke is amplified by the use of estrogen-containing birth control methods. The best evidence to date suggests the following risk profiles for women age 20-44:

- *A woman with a history of migraine has a **4 fold** increase in her risk of stroke compared to her peer who does not have migraines, or 16 to 20 strokes per 100,000 women with migraine per year.*
- *If the same woman with migraines uses a low-dose estrogen-containing birth control method, her risk for stroke is increased by **7 fold** to 28 to 35 strokes per 100,000 women with migraines who use low-dose estrogen-containing birth control pills per year.*
- *The woman who has migraines, uses an estrogen-containing birth control method, and smokes has a **34 fold** increase in her risk of stroke, or 134 to 170 strokes per 100,000 smokers with migraines on birth control pills per year.*

For the above reasons, it is **strongly recommended** that women with a personal or family history of migraine headaches should select non-estrogen methods of contraception. Ask your health care providers about the alternative options.

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References:

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