



Little evidence of weight gain with progestin-only contraceptives

Clinical question

What is the association between progestin-only contraceptive use and changes in body weight?

Bottom line

There was little evidence of weight gain for women when using progestin-only contraceptives. Some differences were noted when a progestin-only contraceptive was compared with no hormonal contraceptive. Actual mean weight gain was low for 6 to 12 months, ie, less than 2kg in most studies. Good counselling about typical weight gain may help reduce discontinuation of contraceptives due to perceptions of weight gain.

Caveat

It was not possible to conduct a meta-analysis due to the range of contraceptive methods examined and differences in reporting of weight change. More weight gain was noted at 2 and 3 years, but was generally similar for both comparison groups. People may gain weight over time regardless of contraceptive use.

Context

Progestin-only contraceptives are appropriate for many women who cannot or should not take oestrogen. Many progestin-only contraceptives are long-acting, cost-effective methods of preventing pregnancy. However, concern about weight gain can deter the initiation of contraceptives and cause early discontinuation among users.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Lopez LM et al. Progestin-only contraceptives: effects on weight. Cochrane Reviews, 2011, Issue 4. Article No. CD008815. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD008815.pub2.

This review contains 15 studies involving over 8400 participants.

PEARLS No. 329, September 2011, written by Brian R McAvoy

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners – developed by the Cochrane Primary Care Field, New Zealand Branch of the Australasian Cochrane Centre at the Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care, University of Auckland and funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group. New Zealanders can access the Cochrane Library free via www.nzgg.org.nz

PEARLS provide guidance on whether a treatment is effective or ineffective. PEARLS are prepared as an educational resource and do not replace clinician judgement in the management of individual cases. View PEARLS online at: www.nzdoctor.co.nz; www.nzgg.org.nz; www.cochraneprimarycare.org