

GYNAECOLOGY & OBSTETRICS UPDATE

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Contraception for Women Aged Over 40 Years

Part I: Which Contraceptive method?

No contraceptive method is contraindicated by age alone (Table 1 & 2). The benefits, risks and contraindications for contraceptive methods for women aged over 40 years include those for any age with the additional following advice:

- women who are aged 35 years or over and smoke should be advised that the risks of using combined hormonal contraception (CHC) usually outweigh the benefits.
- Practitioners who are prescribing CHC to women aged over 40 years may wish to consider a pill with <30 µg ethinylestradiol as a suitable first choice.
- Blood pressure should be checked before and at least 6 months after initiating a woman aged over 40 years on CHC and monitored at least annually thereafter. Hypertension may increase the risk of stroke and myocardial infarction (MI) in those using CHC.
- Women who wish to continue using depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA) should be reviewed every 2 years to assess the benefits and potential risks. Users of DMPA should be supported in their choice of whether or not to continue using DMPA up to a maximum recommended age of 50 years. DMPA is associated with a small loss of bone mineral density
- women may seek advice if they experience any problems with their contraception, change in medical history that may influence contraceptive choice, or when they reach the age of 50

Reference: Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare Clinical Guidance *July 2010*

Table 1 UK Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use (UKMEC) categories based on age¹⁰

Contraceptive method	Age range (years)	UKMEC category
Combined hormonal contraception (CHC) (combined oral contraception, transdermal patch, combined vaginal ring)	≥40	2
Progestogen-only pill (POP)	≥40	1
Progestogen-only implant	≥40	1
Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA)	18-45	1
	>45	2
Norethisterone enantate (NET-EN)	18-45	1
	>45	2
Copper-bearing intrauterine device (Cu-IUD)	≥40	1
Levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine system (LNG-IUS)	≥40	1
Barrier methods	≥40	1
Emergency contraception	≥40	1

Table 2 Definition of UK Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use (UKMEC) categories¹⁰

Category	Definition
UKMEC 1	A condition for which there is no restriction for the use of the contraceptive method.
UKMEC 2	A condition where the advantages of using the method generally outweigh the theoretical or proven risks.

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