

fullness and soreness of the breasts, suffer from headaches or even changes in their personality. Some women also gain weight rapidly, some have disturbance of their menstrual flow. Rarely, the menses do not return for some time after the pills are discontinued—which, of course, makes the patient fear she is pregnant.

Fortunately, in most instances these complaints disappear within a couple of months, as in pregnancy. But not always. At times, the weight gain, bleeding and personality changes maybe sufficiently disconcerting to warrant discontinuance of the pills.

But these are just nuisance factors. What about the reports of more serious problems? I have heard oral contraceptives accused of masculinizing female babies if taken inadvertently during early pregnancy, of interfering with future fertility, of causing uterine fibroids or even cancer. Most of these charges are palpable nonsense—there is no evidence to support any of them. Indeed, many patients report getting both physical and psychological benefits from the pills.

DANGER—LEG CLOTS

There is, however, one other widely reported problem connected with oral contraceptives. From time to time women taking them have developed blood clots (thrombosis) in the veins of their pelvis or legs. This can be serious—even fatal—but studies do not indicate that pills cause the clots. Thrombosis also occurs in men, and in women who are not taking contraceptive pills.

I am reminded of a recent medical meeting where a doctor reported several instances of leg clots occurring in patients taking the pills. Another doctor promptly rose. His patient too had been given a prescription for the pills, and had developed leg clots. But she had forgotten to have the prescription filled!

Do I myself prescribe the pills? I do, whenever I think they are indicated. But to avoid even the most remote risk, I would not prescribe them to women who have had blood clots, varicose veins, heart or kidney disease, or malignancy.

To sum up, my own answer to anxious patients is yes, there is good reason to believe that oral contraceptives are safe for normal women under their physicians' supervision.