COMBINED HORMONAL CONTRACEPTION

INTRODUCTION

One of the most commonly used contraceptive methods in the UK is the combined oral contraceptive pill. Combined hormonal contraceptives (CHCs) contain estrogen and progestogen and there are currently three methods available in the UK:
- combined oral contraceptive pill (COCP)
- combined transdermal patch (CTP)
- combined vaginal ring (CVR).

The abbreviations are used in this module.

Many GPs and nurses will be familiar with the COCP, but the other methods are very slowly increasing in usage. This module discusses the use of all three combined hormonal methods, but does not cover alternative contraceptive choices available in any detail.

The evidence on CHC usage is constantly being updated. There has been recent new advice issued in relation to CHC and antibiotics that do not induce enzymes. In addition there is new “missed pill” advice, and advice in relation to incorrect use of the patch and ring.

Finally there are updated UK Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive Use (UKMEC). Information points apply equally to all CHCs, unless otherwise stated.

UKMEC advice, and lists of other risks and benefits of the CHCs, are useful aide memoires for clinicians. For this reason, this information has been concentrated in the appendices to this module, which are free from copyright, and therefore can be photocopied. Group members are advised to study the appendices, particularly appendix 1, which explains the UKMEC categories. This will aid understanding of the levels of risk associated with CHCs and medical conditions.