

## Breast Health and Birth Control

Themed awareness months are not uncommon, but with the onset of October comes what is perhaps the most well-known of them all - Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The most commonly diagnosed cancer in women, current statistics demonstrate that 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. Well known risk factors include a family history of breast cancer, age, alcohol consumption, and obesity. While these risk factors are well known, the most commonly discussed among providers and patients may be hormonal relationships to breast cancer and breast cancer risk. Use of the words “hormones” and “breast cancer” conjures thoughts of hormone replacement therapies and the Women’s Health Initiative; however a more commonly utilized hormone therapy is known to affect breast cancer risk as well – hormonal birth control. 99% of sexually active women between the ages of 15 and 44 have used some form of birth control beyond family planning, the most common of these being the birth control pill. What do we currently know about birth control and breast cancer risk?

- Current or recent use of birth control pills is associated with a slightly increased risk of breast cancer This increased risk is not seen 10 years post birth control pill use
- Current longer-term users of Depo Provera have a possible increased risk
- Limited information is available in regards to the birth control patch and vaginal ring

While some forms of birth control may slightly increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer, younger age (when women are commonly using birth control) and premenopausal status puts women at a low risk. Once discontinued, the increased risk does decrease over time and diminishes at 10 years. While this is the current understanding of hormonal birth control’s association with breast cancer risk, it is important to note that the majority of information comes from studying previous formulations and minimal information is available based on today’s lower-dose formulations.

### References

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