DOES THE PERCEPTION OF NONCONTRACEPTIVE BENEFITS LEAD TO HIGHER RATES OF CONTRACEPTIVE CONTINUATION FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULT WOMEN?

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Unintended pregnancies, especially among adolescents and young adult women, continue to be a major public health concern despite the availability of a wide range of contraceptive options. Previous research has shown that women who experience negative side effects from their contraceptive method are less likely to continue that method, but no research has studied the effects of experiencing benefits from contraception despite many contraceptives having medical benefits separate from contraception. This study was designed to investigate if adolescents and young adult women who experience noncontraceptive benefits are more likely to continue their chosen contraceptive method.

Over 500 adolescent and young adult women were surveyed at the time of starting contraception regarding their perception of noncontraceptive benefits for their chosen contraceptive method. At least half of participants (51.7%) reported some noncontraceptive benefit at the time of contraception initiation. At 6 months after contraception initiation, 376 participants (71%) completed a second survey regarding contraception continuation and noncontraceptive benefits from their contraceptive method. The rates of perceived noncontraceptive benefits at 6 months were similar to those at time of contraception initiation. The choice of a long acting reversible contraceptive method (LARC) was associated with increased 6 month continuation rates. The perception of any noncontraceptive benefit at 6 months was also associated with increased 6 month continuation rates. Further analyses showed an association between higher continuation rates and the perception of less bloating symptoms among short-acting reversible contraceptive method users specifically and perception of less menstrual symptoms, less PMS symptoms, improvements in headaches, and feeling less depressed for LARC users.

This was the first study to demonstrate that adolescents and young adult women who experience noncontraceptive benefits are more likely to continue their contraceptive method. This study also supports the association between choosing a LARC method and increased contraception continuation. Contraceptive counseling that focuses more on noncontraceptive benefits of contraceptive methods and the use of LARC methods could improve continuation rates in this at-risk population.