

## **Birth Control and Chemical Contraception**

The topic of birth control has come up at least half a dozen times recently. Most young adults, while eager for the truth about birth control pills and contraceptive shots, feel they must use them to prevent unwanted pregnancies. What is most amazing is the lack of information available on the incredibly harmful effects of using synthetic hormonal or chemical-type birth control methods. Planned Parenthood promotes almost exclusively contraception methods that are hormonal or chemical in nature. Although natural birth control options exist and have been used successfully for hundreds of years (and I have personally used these methods my entire adult life), most of today's young adults are not aware of these options. This Back to Basics column, as well as next month's column, is dedicated to the many young adults who are seeking a more natural lifestyle and are asking the right questions regarding fertility and birth control.

by Dr. Joseph Mercola  
with Rachael Droege

### **Contraception:**

#### **Five Important Facts You Need to Know**

Close to 39 million U.S. women use some form of contraception with female sterilization, the birth control pill and the condom being the most widely used methods in the United States. Other methods include hormonal injections, implants, intrauterine devices (IUDs) and the birth control patch.

The different contraception methods act in very different ways and can be broken down as follows:

**Barrier Methods** This method works by physically preventing the sperm from reaching the egg. It includes condoms (and female condoms), the diaphragm, the cervical cap and the sponge, which is not currently on the market.

**Hormonal Methods** Typically, hormonal birth control methods work by releasing estrogen and progestin into the body, preventing the ovaries from releasing eggs. They also thicken cervical mucus, making it harder for sperm to enter the uterus. There are a wide variety of hormonal methods on the market including oral birth control pills, implants (Norplant), hormone shots like Depo-Provera, a vaginal ring called NuvaRing, and a contraceptive hormone patch worn on the skin.

**Spermicides** This method involves a chemical that kills or disables sperm so that it cannot cause pregnancy. It comes in many different forms: foam, jelly, cream, film, and vaginal suppositories.

## **Intrauterine Devices (IUDs)**

This is a small, plastic, T-shaped stick with a string attached to the end. The IUD is placed inside the uterus and prevents sperm from joining with an egg. It does this by making the sperm unable to go into the egg and by changing the lining of the uterus.

## **Natural Family Planning**

In this method, a woman uses various techniques to determine when she is fertile during the month. By avoiding sexual intimacy or using a backup method during the window of fertility, pregnancy can be avoided. Techniques include the ovulation method, the symptothermal method, which is a combination of the ovulation method and monitoring of body temperature, and monitoring saliva with the Ovu-Tech magnification lens.

If you use contraception, the decision of which method to use can be overwhelming and it seems that most women are not adequately informed of their options. For instance, most doctors who see women about contraceptive concerns underestimate the effectiveness of natural family planning options and rarely or never mention them. More than 16 million U.S. women choose birth control pills as their "preferred" method. It is likely that a majority of these women "choose" birth control pills due to lack of awareness of reliable and safer birth control options.

## **Side effects of the pill**

- Increased risk of breast cancer
- Increased risk of cervical cancer
- Increased risk of endometrial cancer
- Increased risk of ovarian cancer
- Liver tumors
- Blood clots
- High blood pressure
- Cycle irregularities
- Miscarriages
- Headaches
- Migraines
- Cramps
- Bloating
- Nausea
- Vaginal infections
- Gall bladder disease
- Mental depression
- Loss of sexual drive
- Side effects of the patch
- Raised risk of heart attack and stroke
- Irregular bleeding
- Problems wearing contact lenses
- Fluid retention or raised blood pressure
- Nausea
- Headache
- Breast tenderness
- Mood changes
- Menstrual cramps
- Abdominal pain
- Skin irritation or rashes at site of patch

## Side effects of the Depo-Provera

- Weight gain
- Headaches
- Breast swelling and tenderness
- Decreased sexual desire
- Depression
- Bloating
- Swelling of the hands and feet
- Nervousness
- Abdominal cramps
- Dizziness
- Weakness of fatigue
- Leg cramps
- Nausea
- Vaginal discharge or irritation
- Backache
- Insomnia
- Acne
- Pelvic pain
- Lack of hair growth or excessive hair loss
- Rashes
- Hot flashes
- Joint pain
- Convulsions
- Jaundice
- Urinary tract infections
- Allergic reactions
- Fainting
- Paralysis
- Osteoporosis
- Lack of return to fertility
- Deep vein thrombosis
- Pulmonary embolus
- Breast and cervical cancers
- Abnormal menstrual bleeding
- Unexpected breast milk production
- Changes in speech, coordination, or vision
- Swelling of face, ankles or feet
- Mood changes
- Unusual fatigue

Aside from the side effects many women experience while using contraceptive products containing synthetic hormones, there is a dramatically increased likelihood that exposure to these products will result in serious chronic illnesses such as cancer.

Below I've included five important facts that you can use to make an informed contraception decision for yourself.

### **1. Hormonal contraceptives are SYNTHETIC hormones.**

The body is not designed to be exposed to these synthetic hormones, and long-term use will invariably increase the user's risk of developing serious chronic illness. In my view, there is no medical justification for using birth control pills or other hormonal methods. The benefits simply do not outweigh the tremendous risks. (See table of side effects above).

## **2. Birth control pills can deplete important nutrients.**

Aside from the long list of potential side effects, birth control pills can deplete your body of nutrients. These nutrients include: Vitamin B2, Vitamin B6, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Vitamin C, Magnesium and Zinc

## **3. There are much safer options to using hormonal contraceptives.**

Barrier methods and natural family planning (NFP) offer much safer, albeit less convenient, options than hormonal contraceptives. With NFP, there are no side effects and no toxic substances to put in your body and women often feel empowered as they become aware of their fertility cycle. I do recommend that you learn the method from a reliable source and if preventing pregnancy is an absolute must you may want to use a backup barrier method. Because these other safer options exist, I ask ALL of my patients to stop hormonal contraceptives like birth control pills as soon as possible.

## **4. Depo-Provera hormone shots are fraught with complications.**

A study in the May, 2004 edition of the journal Obstetrics and Gynecology found that Depo-Provera users had declines in bone mineral density averaging 3 percent each year. Those on the shot for two years had losses in bone mineral density of roughly 6 percent, compared with a loss of 2.6 percent among women on birth control pills. Comparatively, women using no hormonal contraceptives had, on average, a 2 percent increase in bone density during the same period.

Aside from bone loss, the Depo-Provera shot is associated with a long list of additional side effects (see chart at right).

## **5. Spermicides can promote urinary tract and yeast infections.**

Spermicides are essentially chemicals (usually nonoxynol-9 (N-9)) that kill sperm by dissolving their outer membrane. However, they also kill beneficial bacteria and skin cells. Disrupting the beneficial bacteria in the vagina can leave women more susceptible to urinary tract infections and yeast infections.

Further, according to a 2001 report from the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that condoms lubricated with nonoxynol-9 are any more effective in preventing pregnancy or infection than condoms lubricated with silicone, and such condoms should no longer be promoted.

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Note: To the detriment of the women in our society (yet to the benefit of the pharmaceutical industry), the topic of birth control and the promiscuous sexual activity it implies is taboo in our culture. The biochemical importance of this issue to current and

future reproductive generations is far greater than our concern for the eyebrows the topic tends to raise.

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