

The Birth Control Pill

By Sandra Gottwald, M.D.
Obstetrics & Gynecology

It's important to recognize the Birth Control Pill for what it has contributed to women's health over the years because its benefits are significant and far-reaching.

Innovative contraception with many benefits

The Birth Control Pill was the first truly effective method of contraception. The pill's convenience, coupled with its success rate of over 98% when used correctly, made it a true medical breakthrough.

The Birth Control Pill's ingenious combination of synthetic estrogen and progesterone prevents the pituitary gland from stimulating the ovaries. Through this "negative feedback" effect, no egg is released and conception is prevented. And even though the ovaries are shut down during this process, the uterus still responds to hormonal stimulation from the Pill's components, and as such, a woman still experiences menstrual flow.

What's particularly interesting about the Pill's history is that as technology has evolved over the last 41 years, so has the Pill. Formulations today contain approximately one-third the hormonal content of the original pill yet they still retain their effectiveness in preventing pregnancy while minimizing side effects such as bloating and acne.

Applications for the Pill have increased as well. In addition to contraception, the Pill is a widely used medical tool. Many women have benefitted from the Pill's effects in regulating menstrual cycles, decreasing blood flow and alleviating painful cramps.

Myths still exist

In spite of all of these positives, myths still persist. Many patients hesitate to take oral



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contraceptives due to these perceived side effects they have heard about. But the facts speak for themselves.

Few women realize that they are six times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related complication than from any adverse effect related to taking the Pill and smoking under the age of 35. In addition, studies show that the Birth Control Pill is the only known medical protection against ovarian cancer, the deadliest of

gynecological malignancies. Pill use decreases a woman's risk of ovarian cancer by 40%, while lowering her risk of uterine cancer by 50%. Currently, there is no convincing evidence to show a relationship between the Birth Control Pill and breast cancer. However the Pill does decrease fibrocystic breast disease, a painful problem for many women.

There are countless other myths which are commonly heard. To correct two of them, Pill use does not impair future fertility, and does not cause weight gain.

Birth Control after 35

A major change in oral contraceptive labelling has now allowed Birth Control Pill use after the age of 35. If a woman does not smoke and does not have hypertension, or any history of a clotting disorder, she may now safely use the Pill until she reaches menopause.

This new prescribing regimen is beneficial to many patients who wish to maintain the pill's many benefits during a time when contraception is still an issue and menstrual irregularities are quite prominent. In fact, Birth Control Pill use is now succeeding hysterectomy as the primary management for perimenopausal bleeding abnormalities,

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preventing the need for major surgery.

When menopause does intervene, a simple blood test taken on the seventh day of a pill-free week can indicate the need to cease Pill use and consider the option of lower dose post-menopausal hormone replacement therapy, an important protection against heart disease and osteoporosis. We are now also seeing a variation in the Pill's dosing regimen, with a shortened - or completely eliminated - "Pill Free Interval." By altering this, periods can be diminished or avoided entirely.

In medicine, Time is the ultimate test, validating or refuting treatments and beliefs. The Birth Control Pill has withstood these trials magnificently for over 40 years and will undoubtedly enjoy a more favorable reputation in the decades to come. It deserves no less.

For more information call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at www.ah.com.

Sandra Gottwald, M.D., is an Obstetrics and Gynecology physician with Advanced Healthcare's Cedar Creek Clinic (215 West Washington Street, Grafton, 262-375-3700) and Good Hope Clinic (3003 West Good Hope Road, Milwaukee, 414-352-3100).

Dr. Gottwald and her colleagues at Advanced Healthcare are leading physicians in Obstetrics & Gynecology. Her colleagues include:

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- Ann Cornell, M.D.*
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