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CONTRACEPTION AND WOMEN

Isn't "the Pill" Good for Women and Society?



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One gets the idea, especially since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, which declared contraception “essential medicine,” that hormonal contraceptive drugs are like Aspirin or vitamins – all benefit and (now, literally) no cost.

The fact is, however, that this assumption is grossly wrong, and it is women who pay the greatest price for this error. If you read widely enough, you may find reports of class action lawsuits against the producers of various kinds of contraception, of the growing body of science that shows the harm done to women’s bodies and to the environment. But you won’t hear the media raise the question of whether or not hormonal contraception is good for women, most likely because sterility has become to many a more desired health outcome than natural fertility, so the many threats to women’s health that come from using contraception are consistently ignored.

A Long List of Serious Side Effects

How about a more common sense approach? Regularly taking powerful steroids, which are what hormonal contraceptives from the pill to injectable Depo-Provera are, has tremendous impacts on the human body. It should come as no surprise that they cause a long list of side effects, from minor ones like headaches to serious ones like severe depression and even death. **In fact, hormonal contraceptives such as the pill have been confirmed as carcinogens by the World Health Organization (WHO).**¹ That is, hormonal contraception is known to cause cancer in women, and to be dangerous enough to be in the same category as cigarettes and asbestos.

When taking hormonal contraceptives, “teenagers are especially vulnerable to breast cancer risk because their breasts are growing,” says the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute. The World Health Organization (WHO) discussed the pill-breast cancer link in a 2005 report, as did the *New England*

*Journal of Medicine in January 2006.*⁴ Though the pill lowers the risk of ovarian and endometrial cancers, “according to the American Cancer Society, out of [a random selection of] 100 women with cancer, 31 have breast cancer, 6 have endometrial cancer and only 3 have ovarian cancer, so it is not a good ‘trade-off’ in risk,” says the institute. The WHO’s panel of scientists concluded that the pill raised the risks of breast, cervical, and liver cancer.

Reading the Fine Print

From one contraception drug producers’ own information pamphlets, in very small print, we find side effects that don’t make it into the normal media discussion of birth control: Anaphylaxis and anaphylactoid reactions; sudden total or partial blindness; deep vein thrombosis; heart attacks; liver, cervical and breast cancers; stroke; ectopic pregnancies; pulmonary embolisms; hypertension (high blood pressure); dizziness, vertigo and fainting; abdominal discomfort, bloating and pain; gall bladder problems, including gallstones; inflammation of the pancreas; nausea and vomiting; fluid accumulation; phlebitis (clots in the veins); insulin sensitivity; elevated potassium levels; migraine or severe headaches; depression and mood swings; breast pain and swelling; a number of changes in menstruation patterns, including PMS and dysmenorrhea; acne and rashes; hair loss; fatigue; and significant weight gain.²

One of the most serious side effects of the pill is the increased risk of deep vein thrombosis, or blood clots that can potentially become fatal. According to the *Guardian* (March 6, 2009), Britain’s most prominent progressive newspaper, some versions of the pill increase the risk of deep vein thrombosis by 5 times, as reported by the British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. This condition can lead to fatal or seriously life-changing strokes, even in young women.

Scientific Studies Confirm Common Sense

Shouldn’t it be common sense that putting a high level of synthetic hormones into a person’s body will lead to unintended, even ironic, consequences? In the January 2006 issue of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, researchers reported that the Pill so severely affects hormonal levels, that women’s sex drive is negatively

affected. One of the report's authors, Dr. Irwin Goldstein, noted that "[In our practice many women with sexual dysfunction who had used the oral contraceptive but whose sexual and hormonal problems persisted despite stopping the birth control pill."³

A Kinsey Institute study corroborated the finding that women on the pill frequently suffer a loss of sexual desire, and that 40% also reported a decrease in well-being. *Elle* magazine, long a supporter of birth control, also confirmed that the Pill has unintended effects: "Elizabeth Lee Vliet, MD, a women's health specialist and the author of *It's My Ovaries, Stupid!*, thinks that [oral contraceptives'] negative impact on moods—she especially blames high-progesterone formulations—might even bring about the need for antidepressants: The Pill screws up a woman's mood and libido, and then she ends up on Prozac."⁵

Picking the Wrong Man

A study published in the August 2008 edition of the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* found that when women smelled the T-shirts worn by men, they were attracted to more genetically dissimilar men before going on the Pill. After going on it, they were attracted to men genetically similar to themselves. This means that a woman on the pill before marriage who later stopped taking it in order to have children could find herself no longer attracted to her husband. Evolutionary psychologist Craig Roberts, one of the researchers, said, "Not only could [genetic] similarity in couples lead to fertility problems but it could ultimately lead to the breakdown of relationships when women stop using the contraceptive pill, as odour perception plays a significant role in maintaining attraction to partners."

Poisoning the Environment

Much of the female hormone in the pill is excreted via urine and ends up in the world's rivers and lakes. Scientists are finding ever-greater numbers of "intersex" animals in aquatic environments that could lead to a collapse in fish and other populations, followed by a decrease in the populations of animals dependent on them. The *Washington Post* reported on April 22, 2009,

“More than 80% of the male small mouth bass in the Potomac River are growing eggs.” The first intersex bass were discovered only in 2003, making the growth of this phenomenon extraordinarily rapid. In certain places, said the *Post*, “100% of the male fish had some female characteristics.” In the Feb. 8, 2008 *Post*, scientists said the cause “is probably some pollutant created by humans—perhaps a farm chemical, or treated sewage, which can contain human hormones or residue from birth-control pills.” The later *Post* article reported that scientists think the problem is caused by a mixture of hormone and hormone-mimicking pollutants, and have found negative effects on female fish as well. No one knows what effects such pollutants are having on children. Iain Murray, author of *The Really Inconvenient Truths*, wrote on *National Review Online* (April 22, 2008), “By any standard typically used by environmentalists, the pill is a pollutant. It does the same thing, just worse, as other chemicals they call pollution.”

Causing Abortion

Though the Pill appears to act the great majority of the time by preventing conception by suppressing ovulation and by inhibiting sperm transport through the woman’s body, at other times it causes abortion by preventing the implantation of an already-conceived child in the womb. In some women, the Pill suppresses ovulation almost completely. In those women in which it doesn’t, the Pill may allow conception and cause the subsequent abortion of unborn children.

We must admit that we are confused as to why a drug that prevents the healthy operation of a basic human function (by way of high levels of hormones) is seen as “essential medicine” by so many well-meaning people. Regardless of how we got here, we now have to show friends and family, and society at large, what science and millions of women have found, that hormonal contraception is not good for women’s health, or for society.

(Endnotes)

1. “World Health Organization. ‘Carcinogenicity of Combined Hormonal Contraceptives and Combined Menopausal Treatment.’ Statement of September 2005.”

2. Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals. "Highlights of Prescribing Information: Yasmin," April 2012; Janssen Pharmaceuticals. "Micronor® Oral Contraceptive Tablets," March 2012.
3. Panzer, Wise, Goldstein, et al., "Impact of Oral Contraceptives on Sex Hormone-Binding Globulin and Androgen Levels: A Retrospective Study in Women with Sexual Dysfunction", *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, Jan. 2006, Vol. 3 Iss. 1, 104-113.
4. Yager, Davidson, "Estrogen Carcinogenesis in Breast Cancer", *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 2006, Vol. 354, No. 3, 270-282.
5. Rachael Combe. "Sexual Chemistry." *Elle*, September 2005.

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