

COSMOPOLITAN

What Guys Really Know About Birth Control: A Cosmopolitan Survey

What do guys think about contraception? Not much, apparently. As many as 1 in 3 guys say it's a woman's responsibility to make sure she doesn't get pregnant, and 57 percent of guys say they never or rarely worry about an unplanned pregnancy, according to a new survey of more than 1,200 guys ages 20 to 39 by Cosmopolitan and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Fewer than one-third of them say it's a topic they often bring up with a partner. And 46 percent say that at least half the time they've had sex in recent years, they didn't even know if their partner was using birth control! "It is crazy to me that this is something guys don't discuss with their partners," says Ginny Ehrlich, chief executive officer at The National Campaign. "The stakes are high for them too."

So we've found definitive proof at last that guys are self-centered jerks, right? Well ... maybe not (or at least not entirely). Turns out, guys aren't sure what their role is when it comes to birth control or if it's even their place to offer their two cents. Fifty-seven percent of guys believe that women should be in charge of birth control decisions because "it's her body, her choice." More than 7 in 10 think if a woman wants a man's opinion on birth control, she'll ask. And 39 percent of guys say if a woman doesn't bring up the topic of birth control, they figure she has it covered.

"It seems we're the product of our success here, which is that we've given the message that it's a woman's body and she's in command of her own reproductive health," says Drew Pinsky, MD, host of Dr. Drew On Call and Loveline. "But it's bad that we seem to have left out the part where men still have a responsibility and role to play as well. It's two people engaging in an intimate act that comes with a lot consequences, and it's unfair for women to be left alone to manage this."

It's not only that it's a big stressful job to take on all alone. A lack of male involvement in contraception also contributes to higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies. "Research shows that engaging males on this issue tends to increase the use of sexual-health services overall for men and women," says Arik V. Marcell, MD, an adolescent medicine expert at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore. "Sex is a couples behavior, so we have to address both sides of the equation." Oh, and P.S.: When men don't think birth control is their issue, it means women don't get the support we need from men who often run our universities, insurance companies, and government offices.

The good news: The guys we surveyed seem willing to be brought up to speed. Forty-four percent say they've learned about birth control from a girlfriend, and 49 percent wish they knew more. "Women should be encouraged by the fact that guys look to them for guidance on this issue," says Dr. Pinsky. "Speak up and be assertive because he'll listen ... especially when sex lies in the balance."

HOW CLUELESS IS HE?

Very clueless, TBH. More than 60 percent think a NuvaRing has to be inserted by a doctor (no). More than 1 in 4 guys think two condoms work better than one (nooo!). Fewer than half of guys say they know "at least something" about the IUD, ring, shot, or implant. And the survey gives us reason to suspect that some of those guys who claim knowledge might be faking it: Nearly a quarter of men claim to know "at least something" about the contraceptive cone — a method we made up (sorry, boys).

It's hard to blame guys when the majority admit their main source of info was a high school sex-ed class they may have taken a decade ago. Young men are even less likely to receive sexual-health information from parents, teachers, and health-care providers than young women are, research in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* shows. "The majority of education, resources, and interventions around contraception focus on women, and we have limited to no conversations with young men about it in any setting," says study author Dr. Marcell, of the Johns Hopkins Children's Center. "They want to talk about it, but when you're starting from minimal knowledge, it can be hard for guys to know what questions to ask."