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#REALTALK

THE GREAT BIRTH-CONTROL BITCHFEST

Why do we only talk about contraception when we're complaining? I <3 my pills, actually. BY DANIELLE MCNALLY

DON'T GET ME WRONG, I love kids. In fact, I just became an aunt, and there's something special about being connected to an adorable nugget who shares your DNA but for whom you bear no respon-

sibility (#CoolAunt). But I wouldn't love having my own kid right now. Sure, I have a killer job and am in a committed relationship, but I'm still paying off credit-card debt from my early 20s. Adding an expensive infant wouldn't be ideal, especially since research shows couples who have an unplanned pregnancy are twice as likely to split up.

Which is why I've been happily tossing back oral contraception—the combo pill Mononessa, to be specific—daily for the past decade-plus (often yelling “no babies” to my boyfriend as I do so). Having control over my reproductive system is clutch. It has lightened and shortened my period and reduced my risk for some cancers—particularly ovarian and uterine. And my no-dependents status on my tax return has enabled me to

complete my education and lean in to my career.

Before *Eisenstadt v. Baird* legalized birth control for all women in 1972, no woman had run a Fortune 500 company. Since then, 50 have. In about the same time frame, the slice of women with a bachelor's degree went from 8 percent to 31 percent, and studies suggest contraception played a role in that progress, according to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy—sponsor of the annual Thanks, Birth Control Day social-media campaign (November 16). “Birth control has been a game changer when it comes to women living their best lives,” says Ginny Ehrlich, CEO

of The National Campaign. “Before it, women didn't have the power to decide when, if, and under what circumstances to get pregnant.”

But you wouldn't know about the positive consequences of contraception if you were a fly on the wall during GNO. We don't bring it up until something goes wrong: weight gain, acne, anxiety. Why so neggy? Using birth control still carries a stigma, says Colleen Krajewski, MD, ob-gyn and medical adviser to The National Campaign. The assumption persists that “if you carry a condom, you're a slut,” she observes. “And the word *hormonal*—it's usually derogatory.” Which may contribute to all the attention paid to potential side effects.

Side effects suck, and if you have them, complain as loudly as you like. But science says they may not be as common as we believe. I blamed a period of constant crying on a three-month switch to the NuvaRing, but it's more likely I was just in a bad relationship. A 2011 white paper published in *Contraception* concluded that side effects occur no more significantly from oral contraceptives than from a placebo. The researchers blamed widespread negativity on rumors and poor-quality research. “There's a difference between an individual woman

70 PERCENTAGE OF PREGNANCIES UNMARRIED WOMEN IN THEIR 20S REPORT AS UNPLANNED. IF THAT STAT FREAKS YOU OUT, USE CONTRACEPTION.

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN AND UNPLANNED PREGNANCY

and 10,000 women,” Dr. Krajewski says. “If I suspected my patients would encounter a ton of terrible side effects with birth-control pills, I wouldn't prescribe them.”

The worst thing, says Dr. Krajewski, is when a girl stops using contraception without talking to anyone. “Before you leave your doctor's office, have a plan: ‘If I don't like this, what number can I call? Do I have a follow-up scheduled?’” All medications have an adjustment period. Give yourself three to four months with the Pill and six months to a year with an IUD. If you're still dissatisfied, switch. (Visit Bedsider.org for the deets on each.)

So when myths and complaints ping-pong across the brunch table, like a sorority sister contemplating quitting the Pill because she “needs a hormonal detox,” let's shut the haters down. (For the record, combined hormonal birth control contains similar types and levels of hormones produced naturally, just in a different pattern.) And if any friend counters with the argument that “unnatural” hormones make you not your real self, I have my retort all planned: I'm a woman with a great sex life, a great career, and no kids, so I'll take this self over whoever I really am any day. Thanks, birth control.



HEALTH HACK

YOU SHOULD O EVERY DAY

And not just for the obvious reason. Climaxing on the reg is also an excellent stress reducer, and a bunch of new research shows it has bonus health benefits.

Less Pain

The flood of oxytocin and endorphins that curl your toes are powerful pain killers: Masturbating raises pain tolerance by almost 75 percent. Try it to soothe headaches or sore muscles.

A Better Brain

Orgasms boost blood flow to the brain. Although your mind may be spinning, cells are shielded from degeneration, keeping you sharp now and potentially lowering your risk for stroke, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's later.

A Lighter Body

Order up pre-dinner sex: Finishing triggers the digestive hormone CCK, which in turn ups appetite-suppressing hormones. The result is a full feeling that may help you avoid mindless eating.

—GINA ROBERTS-GREY



Ask Dr. Ashton

I can't get wet even though I'm turned on—what gives?

You and a lot of other women, since nearly 20 percent of young women experience vaginal dryness. Causes include stress, vaginitis, hormonal contraception, even antihistamines (if it dries out your sinuses, it could dry out your vagina). Try correcting for these issues—talk to your partner about sex anxiety or try a different BC brand. If it's still a desert down there, a 30-minute in-office procedure called ThermiVa uses radio waves to increase lubrication. It's a little pricey, so talk to your gyno about all your options.

SOURCE: JENNIFER ASHTON, MD, OB-GYN AND ABC NEWS CHIEF WOMEN'S HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

FROM LEFT: LEVI BROWN/TRUNK ARCHIVE; HENRY KING/GETTY IMAGES.