

teenVOGUE

This Powerful Hashtag Perfectly Shows How Much Birth Control Has Done for Women

Today, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is celebrating the liberation of birth control, and raising awareness to prevent teen pregnancy with a stellar social media campaign. So get your hashtag ready — it's #ThxBirthControl — and get ready to thank birth control for everything it's done for you over the years (i.e. preventing pregnancy, helping with cramps, clearing up your skin, and altogether making the world a better place).

But in order to debunk some myths about birth control and clarify some statistics, *Teen Vogue* chatted with Ginny Ehrlich, the chief executive officer of the National Campaign in order to get the facts straight. The organization has some powerful information behind its popular social media campaign, which hopefully proves that even more women would use birth control if they were more educated on the topic. More women would also probably use birth control if it were more acceptable to talk about in casual conversation. That's why this campaign is so important: everyone should always feel empowered and comfortable discussing birth control. We'll go first!

Teen Vogue: If you could give teens any advice about birth control, what would it be?

Ginny Ehrlich: I'd want teens to make sure that they're making the decision to have sex on their own terms. If they aren't doing it because of pressure, but because they really feel it's the right decision for them, get educated by going to stayteen.org. They should go to a healthcare provider and plan ahead, so this isn't something they do the third or fourth time they have sex, but the first. Women use a variety of different methods during their lifetime, so if one doesn't work, take on the responsibility of finding one that will.

TV: What do you think is the most shocking statistic about birth control and teens?

GE: Nearly three out of every 10 girls in the United States get pregnant at least once before age 20. Fourteen percent of teens didn't use a contraceptive method the last time they had sex. Four out of five teens aren't using both a contraceptive method and condoms, so they're putting themselves at risk for STIs even when they are using birth control for contraceptive methods.

TV: What's the most frustrating part about raising birth control awareness?

GE: The majority of adults think teens should have access to birth control, yet we know the numbers aren't as good as they should be. What's frustrating is that 98% of women in their lifetime use birth control and don't talk about it. It's a silent majority. If we look at Europe it's so much more normal to talk about this, it's just part of the way things happen. We have the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the Western world. More than half of teens don't have sex before graduating from high school, so the norm is to delay. Talking about it helps.

TV: What do you think about the way teen pregnancy is portrayed in the media?

GE: We work with the entertainment industry on shows like *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*, where talking about pregnancy and choice making is part of the game. These shows reduced unplanned pregnancy among their viewers. Intuitively, would I have predicted that? No, but I think it's a really powerful medium when it's people teens look up to and watch, especially when three out of four teens say what they "view" in the media influence how they think about their relationships.

TV: What do you hope to accomplish with this social media campaign?

GE: This is our third year doing the campaign with the goal of normalizing the conversation and having leaders of all ages say “birth control has been a game changer.” Since birth control has been available, we’ve seen the first female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, we’ve seen women surpass men in terms of college graduates, we’ve seen an increase in wages.

TV: How did you decide to become involved with this campaign?

GE: I’ve spent my entire career focusing on doing things that level the playing field for teens as they enter into adulthood. We know that girls who delay pregnancy are more likely to go further in school and be more successful in life. It’s just making sure that teens are able to do well, thrive, and feel good about their lives so they can live their best stories.

TV: Where are the best places to find information about birth control?

GE: Stayteen.org is largely written by teens. We have a youth leadership group from around the country that does a lot of content for that. It also has information about birth control and where to find a health center based on your zip code. It can be more comfortable to have that information digitally sometimes. We just had 3,000 essays submitted on the topic on teen pregnancy prevention. We have nearly a million teens really engaged with our website and chats that we do every year. There’s a really fantastic combination when we have effective school and community-based sex education, where teens are learning to critically view media and discern what’s a reliable source vs. what’s not. We really think we need a lot of different options, so teens can make choices based on what they want for their future.

So there you have it, make sure to join the campaign today. Hop on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram to tell everyone what you’ve been able to accomplish thanks to birth control. While it might seem controversial, it’s not political—it’s personal. After all, even if you might know its many benefits, your followers and friends might not. With information about birth control, everyone can have access to the educational and economic opportunities that they deserve.