**Contraception vs. Fertility Awareness Fact Sheet**

July 25, 2018 marks the 50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, Pope Paul VI’s landmark teaching on birth control. While some claim that women’s liberation is tied to accessible birth control, the Church steadfastly proclaims that contraception is unhealthy for women and harmful for marriages. What’s more, science backs up these claims and offers alternatives.

Sex is powerful. It is through the sexual union of a man and a woman that God chose to bring new life into the world, to create a new, unique and eternal soul. Sex also serves to unite a man and a woman and involves spiritual, emotional and even chemical processes that promote monogamous, life-long self-giving. Our bodies speak this language of love, even if we don’t realize it.

Not every act of sex will result in a baby. But, every act of sex includes what the Church calls the "unitive and the procreative dimensions” — the possibility of a baby, and the uniting of the couple — unless we do something to interfere. Sex outside of marriage creates a situation at odds with the body’s uniting process. In this instance, bodies speak the language of a forever commitment while words and actions do not. Within a loving marriage, sex unites spouses and creates a bond they will need to meet the challenges of married life. When couples use contraception, they are withholding part of themselves — their fertility — from the other, negating the total self-gift.

But, God did not leave us with an impossible command! Instead, the Church offers a loving solution. Through the use of fertility awareness methods of Natural Family Planning, spouses can make use of the natural workings of their bodies and plan or postpone pregnancy. For more information, please visit [archla.org/nfp](http://old.la-archdiocese.org/org/familylife/Pages/nfp.aspx) or call 213- 637-7250.

**Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs) and Natural Family Planning (NFP)**

NFP allows women to understand their fertility and their bodies’ natural signs that indicate the working of their reproductive systems. NFP respects the integrity of women’s mental, physical and spiritual health and are in keeping with the Church’s moral teaching and the desire for healthy marriages and flourishing families.

Fertility awareness can be practiced in a variety of ways depending on what works best for the woman and/or the couple. There are apps, health trackers and websites that help record data a woman learns from her own body.

* **NFP is Effective -** NFP methods are evidence-based, use the latest reproductive science published in peer reviewed journals, and have [99% method-effectiveness](https://naturalwomanhood.org/learn/natural-birth-control-methods/) when properly understood and practiced.\*
* **NFP is Eco-friendly - With NFP, there are no adverse side effects from synthetic chemicals or devices in the body** that alter the reproductive system. No synthetic hormones are released into the environment to affect wildlife and no excess packaging and devices are disposed of!
* **NFP Improves Health and Wellness -** NFP is a holistic approach to reproductive health, encouraging self-awareness and increasing the couple’s knowledge of their fertility. For the woman, NFP charting can even assist in the diagnosis of potential underlying medical problems that may affect her cycle or reproductive health.
* **NFP Helps Avoid or Achieve Pregnancy -** For couples having difficulty conceiving, NFP can help them pinpoint the most fertile time of the woman’s cycle. For couples wishing to postpone pregnancy, they can abstain from sex on those days.
* **NFP Fosters Communication and Respect -** NFP encourages respect for and acceptance of each spouse as a whole person, With NFP, both husband and wife share the responsibility for family planning and learn to communicate about their sexuality in new ways. This may be why NFP is correlated with a low divorce rate in practicing couples.
* **NFP Strengthens Relationships -** [When surveyed](http://womenspeakforthemselves.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Final_NFP_Fact_Sheet_17July.pdf), both men and women practicing NFP report satisfaction and improvement in their sex lives, even with the periodic abstinence required for avoiding pregnancy.\*

*\*For citations, please vist archla.org/fertilityawareness*

*Note: Because each woman is different, and cycles can change during the course of a woman’s lifetime, it is always recommended that women or couples beginning Fertility Awareness or NFP meet face to face with a certified instructor so they can have confidence in understanding their bodies’ natural signs and making informed choices.* *Visit* [*archla.org/nfp*](http://old.la-archdiocese.org/org/familylife/Pages/nfp.aspx) *or call 213- 637-7250 to find an NFP instructor near you.*

Visit [FactsAboutFertility.com](http://FactsAboutFertility.com) for more information on the types of NFP available.

**Hormonal Contraceptives: Women’s Health Concerns**

The most common contraceptives used in the United States are hormonal contraceptives (HC’s), including birth control pills, the patch, the shot, and the IUD. Women are often prescribed HC’s as teenagers to alleviate menstrual pain. But while HC’s can reduce symptoms, they do not cure the underlying medical problems. Oftentimes, serious conditions including Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis are simply masked by HC’s instead of being treated as women deserve.

*HC’s send the message that the proper working of a woman’s reproductive system is bad. But hormonal equilibrium is important for women’s overall health. Women deserve better than health risks, fear and shame around their bodies’ natural reproductive capacity.*

**Common Side Effects**

In all forms of HC’s, women most frequently report experiencing headaches and migraine, breast tenderness, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, menstrual disorders, mood disorders (depression, mood swings), decreased libido, infection and acne. [65% of women](https://www.aafp.org/afp/2010/1215/p1499.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22afp20101215p1499-b1) who stop using oral contraceptives do so because of side effects. And the [40% dissatisfaction rate](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-HD-14-024.html) among women regarding their current form of contraception reflects that women want and need something better.\*

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| **Depression and Suicide**For all hormonal contraceptives, women face a [70% higher risk of depression and 3x greater risk of suicide](http://time.com/5030447/birth-control-side-effects-suicide/). These [risks hold for all HC’s](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2552796) including the patch, the pill, the shot, and IUD’s. [Teens on hormonal birth control](https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/appi.ajp.2017.17060616) are especially at risk for depressive and suicidal symptoms. Users of non-oral contraceptives, including long acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), were found to have a [170-220% increase in risk of receiving a depression diagnosis](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2552796). This risk is listed in the labeling of all commonly prescribed contraceptives.\* | **Breast Cancer**Women currently or recently using HC’s had a 20% greater risk of breast cancer over women who had never used HC’s, according to a [Danish cohort study this year](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmoa1700732). Long term use increased risk to 40%. Progesterone based contraception (pills and IUD’s) have a [3x greater risk for breast cancer](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20802021), while oral contraceptives can [increase risk of breast cancer by 50%](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5207615/). Especially at risk are [women under age 24](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1830968) or those on OC’s for longer. The [International Agency for Research on Cancer](https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/general-info/known-and-probable-human-carcinogens.html) lists birth control pills as a Group 1 Carcinogen alongside asbestos, tobacco, radiation, and other harmful products.\* |
| **Heart Disease, Heart Attack and Stroke**Studies show an increased risk for [plaque build-up](https://www.webmd.com/sex/birth-control/news/20071106/artery-plaque-risk-from-the-pill#1) and [heart disease](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9914611), and up to [2.3x greater risk for heart attacks and stroke](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1111840). These risks are especially high for women over 35, smokers, and women already at risk for heart disease. Studies also show women taking the pill are [2-4x more likely to have blood clots](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24464000) which can cause stroke, heart attack, or pulmonary embolism (blockage of the lungs). [These risk factors affect women who would not otherwise be considered at risk for clotting disorders](https://www.hormonesmatter.com/hormonal-birth-control-who-is-at-risk-of-serious-side-effects/). The drugs [Yaz and Yasmin both have ongoing lawsuits](https://www.drugwatch.com/yaz/lawsuits/) associated with clotting.\* | **Early Abortions**[Breakthrough ovulation occurs with hormonal contraceptives in up to 30% of cycles](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-HD-14-024.html). Anytime ovulation occurs, there is a chance of pregnancy. When conception does occur, [hormonal contraceptives can cause early abortions](https://naturalwomanhood.org/women-want-to-know-does-the-pill-cause-abortion/) by [causing the lining of the uterus to shed](http://womenspeakforthemselves.com/the-government-and-big-pharma-already-admit-that-some-bc-can-cause-abortions/). The newly formed zygote is denied a place to implant, cannot survive without nourishment, and will die shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, few people are aware of this risk.\* |

*\*For citations, please visit archla.org/fertilityawareness*

*Note: There are certainly positive effects for hormonal contraceptives including more regularized bleeding and lessened pain with PCOS, PMS and menstrual cramps. HC’s have also been correlated to*[*decreased risks for colorectal, ovarian and endometrial cancers*](https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/hormones/oral-contraceptives-fact-sheet#q2)*. However, since the rate of breast cancer is higher among all women, the increased risk for this one form of cancer still outweighs the decreases in other forms.*

Catholic teaching against the use of contraception is based on theology – an understanding that God created each person to love and be loved, and the way our bodies work reflects that. Individuals or couples using contraception are invited to prayerfully consider a different way. NFP instructors and informational websites can help answer questions. *Visit or call 213- 637-7250 to find an NFP instructor near you.*

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