**Hormonal Contraception Fact Sheet**

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**

Hormonal contraceptives including birth control pills, the patch, the shot, and IUD’s, have concerning side effects for women. 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. With the IUD, women frequently report the above as well as increased bleeding, pelvic pain and infection, ovarian cysts, hair loss or unwanted hair growth, and device expulsion.

You can read the specific side effects in the packaging of major contraceptives linked here:

[Ortho Tri-Cyclen](http://www.janssenlabels.com/package-insert/product-monograph/prescribing-information/ORTHO%2BTRI-CYCLEN%2BLo-pi.pdf) | [Mirena IUD](https://labeling.bayerhealthcare.com/html/products/pi/Mirena_PI.pdf) | [Paragard IUD](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2005/018680s060lbl.pdf) | [Implanon](http://www.merck.com/product/usa/pi_circulars/i/implanon/implanon_ppi.pdf)

[65% of women](https://www.aafp.org/afp/2010/1215/p1499.html#afp20101215p1499-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.

**Long Term Risks of Hormonal Contraceptives:**

* Depression and Suicide – 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 the patch, IUD’s, shots, and pills](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2552796). [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.
* Breast Cancer - A [Danish cohort study this year](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmoa1700732) found women who had recently used or currently were using any form of hormonal contraceptives had a 20% increased risk of breast cancer over women who had never used HC’s. Long term use increased risk to 40%, and some forms of HCs increased risk to 60%. After discontinuation, the risk of breast cancer was still higher compared to women who had not used hormonal contraceptives. This study is also supported by meta-analysis from [The Mayo Clinic](http://polycarp.org/mayo_clinic_article_english_2008.pdf).
* 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.
* 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.
* Autoimmune Disease – HC’s carry an [increased risk for autoimmune diseases](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28912620) including Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis (bowel inflammation), interstitial cystitis (bladder inflammation), Lupus (inflammation in multiple organs), and multiple sclerosis (MS, inflammation causing nerve damage).
* Osteoporosis – HC’s are connected with a [decrease in bone density](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0013683/), [especially in adolescents](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15699307), which may contribute to future osteoporosis.
* Changes in Brain Architecture – Hormonal contraceptives [shrink parts of the pre-frontal cortex](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hbm.22797) in the brain. The long-term effects of this are unknown.

*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.*

**Long Term Risks of Oral Contraceptives:**

* Carcinogenic - Birth control pills are listed alongside asbestos, tobacco, radiation, UV rays and other harmful products as Group 1: Carcinogenic to Humans by the [International Agency for Research on Cancer](https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/general-info/known-and-probable-human-carcinogens.html).
* Cervical Cancer - Women taking oral contraceptives are [2.7x more likely to suffer from cervical cancer](http://cebp.aacrjournals.org/content/22/11/1931). This [risk is especially great for women already suffering from HPV](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11943255). [Cervical cancer risk increases](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17993361) [the longer a woman takes OC’s](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12686037) but decreases after cessation of use.
* Breast Cancer - [Studies suggest risk of breast cancer for women currently using oral contraceptives increases by 50%](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5207615/). [Risk for early breast cancer is especially increased for women under age 24](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1830968), and [longer use of oral contraceptives heightens the cancer risk](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23061743). [The National Cancer Institute](https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/hormones/oral-contraceptives-fact-sheet%20%20%20Relational) also acknowledges these risks.
* Blood Clots - 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.

**Long Term Risks of IUD’s:**

* Depression - Users of non-oral contraceptives, including LARCs, were found to have a [170-220% increase in risk of receiving a depression diagnosis](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2552796).
* Breast Cancer - Levornogestrel based contraception has a [3x greater risk for breast cancer](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20802021), and [lawsuits are currently in process surrounding the Mirena IUD](http://www.prweb.com/releases/2014/08/prweb12087766.htm).
* Side Effects - Women are speaking up, sharing their horror stories on Facebook of awful side effects from the [Mirena](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1010459672305187&set=a.185822708102225.43669.100000234913794&type=3) and [Kyleena](https://www.facebook.com/ashleigh.oxford/posts/10216688088344817) IUDs. One woman, [Tanai Smith](https://www.cosmopolitan.com/health-fitness/a20744068/iud-complication/), shared with Cosmo how her IUD migrated into her stomach, caused her to lose her toes, ovaries and uterus. While her story is by no means the norm, Tanai’s bravery helps to shine a light on the stories of women who have been adversely affected by hormonal contraception.

***There’s a Better Way: Fertility Awareness and Natural Family Planning***

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 is in keeping with the Church’s moral teaching and the desire for healthy marriages and flourishing families. Natural Family Planning is effective, eco-friendly, improves health and wellness, is used to either avoid or achieve pregnancy, fosters communication and respect for both partners, strengthens relationships, plus it's inexpensive!

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.

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.

Visit [FactsAboutFertility.com](http://FactsAboutFertility.com) for more information about Fertility Awareness Based Methods.