Birth Control Pills

by Dr. Andrew T. Brady

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Nearly 20 percent of American women aged 15-44 are currently taking "the pill." Millions of women have made taking birth control pills part of their daily routine. Although oral contraceptives are effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies, they are not as safe as everyone thinks.

Oral contraceptives have become so popular and commonplace that many women don't even consider it a medication. For example, on new patient forms people will often mark that they are not on any medications, but check "yes" to taking birth control. The pharmaceutical companies have done a wonderful job of creating this perception. We all know that birth control works in preventing pregnancy, but what else does it do?

When I was in college, the popular birth control pill was Yaz or Yasmine, and no one thought twice about taking it. Yaz was FDA approved and considered "safe" until it was removed from the market in 2009 because it was causing dangerous blood clots and strokes. We now know that taking Yaz or Yazmine increased blood clot and stroke risk by 74 percent, and more than 8,000 lawsuits have been settled against Bayer, the drug's manufacturer.

A 2016 article published in the peer-reviewed journal Nature labeled oral contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy as a significant contributor to the development of breast cancer. For the past several years, I have strongly believed that this was a significant contributor to the development of breast cancer, but could find very few articles showing an association – until now.

Birth control can also play a part in the development of heart disease. Birth control increases an amino acid called homocysteine, which has been shown to induce inflammation within the walls of the arteries. Women who take birth control can have three times the amount of homocysteine in their body than women who do not take birth control.

It is also my opinion that taking oral contraceptives may play a part in infertility. Oral contraceptives prevent a woman's body from releasing an egg. If you spend 5, 10, or 15 years of your reproductive years telling your body not to release an egg, don't you think it may lose that capability? Although there is no conclusive evidence to support this, it doesn't mean that there never will be.

By taking "the pill" you are accepting these risks. If you develop one of these adverse side effects, will it have been worth it?

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