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\*Clinical study to measure wrinkle reduction and moisturisation with application of Trilogy Certified Organic Rosehip Oil. Twice daily use by 20 women over 8 weeks. Not tested on animals.

12 | SUNDAY  
NOVEMBER 22

## HEALTH DEBATE

# IS THE PILL THE BEST TEMPORARY CONTRACEPTIVE METHOD?



**THE DOCTOR  
DR CINDY PAN**

**T**here are many different forms of contraception, each with its advantages and disadvantages. A woman needs to choose the one that best suits her. However, in most cases the oral contraceptive pill has significant advantages over other forms of reversible contraception, though it also has potential risks, side effects, adverse reactions and complications, including headaches, sore breasts, nausea and an increased risk of blood clots.

While the major advantage of using condoms is that they also protect against sexually transmissible diseases (STDs), the disadvantage is that the condom failure rate is higher and success is dependent on correct use.

With the pill, one is not reliant on taking it at the time of intercourse and, if protection against STDs is required, a condom can be used in addition to the pill.

There are longer-acting contraceptives, such as the depot hormonal injection, which lasts at least three months; the contraceptive implant, which lasts up to three years; the hormonal IUS

(intrauterine system), which lasts up to five years; and the traditional IUD (intrauterine device), which also lasts up to five years. Each has the disadvantage that while it is reversible, this is not necessarily easy and removing an IUS or IUD requires a doctor to perform the procedure. With the pill, a woman can take herself off it simply by not taking it, and her fertility will return.

The contraceptive ring, which is a plastic, hormone-impregnated ring worn inside the vagina, is an equally effective form of reversible contraception, however many women may not like the idea of having to wear it inside their vagina for three weeks out of four.

In addition to being highly effective as a contraceptive – it is 99 per cent effective if it is taken according to instructions – the pill has potential health benefits such as regulating periods, helping with excessively heavy, painful periods and allowing a woman to time her periods or miss them altogether at times when it would be inconvenient or problematic.

The pill can improve or even clear acne, and it eliminates mid-cycle ovulation pain, as well as decreasing one's risk of ovarian cancer (by 40 per cent) and cancer of the uterus (by 50 per cent), benign ovarian cysts, ectopic pregnancy, pelvic inflammatory disease, premenstrual syndrome and anaemia. It is easily accessed and most basic forms are relatively inexpensive.

■ *Dr Cindy Pan has had over 10 years of clinical practice experience. Her books include **Pandora's Box: Lifting The Lid On Life's Little Nasties** (HarperCollins) and **Playing Hard To Get** (HarperCollins). She appears on television, lectures and speaks about all aspects of health, relationships and wellbeing.*

**I** believe that women should have access to a variety of reversible contraceptives so that they can choose the most reliable, effective type for them. The oral contraceptive pill was offered to women as a safe alternative to other methods of birth control. It promised sexual liberation and the ability to choose when you wanted to have children. In theory, it was a major milestone in medicine and women's rights.

Unfortunately, the contraceptive pill also does a few things to the female body that are often not acknowledged or recognised. Importantly, it causes a number of nutritional deficiencies as it affects the body's vitamin and mineral metabolism. These deficiencies then contribute to a number of side effects – some minor and some more concerning. Of greatest concern are the loss of zinc and B vitamins.

These nutritional deficiencies tend to present in a variety of clinical manifestations, however, the most common presentation is lowered mood or depression, anxiety and loss of libido. I often joke with patients that that is why the pill is so effective: you never want to actually have sex! I have also had a number of patients who find

**THE NATUROPATH  
LEAH HECHTMAN**



that their mood changes dramatically when they are taking the pill and they return to their happier selves once they stop taking it. Anything that can interfere with mood this dramatically may not be a good thing for everyone.

There are many reversible contraception options available to women, but I am keenest on those that do not interfere with the natural hormonal cascades within the body. Our hormones, such as oestrogen and progesterone, are not just for making babies. They affect the body in many ways, including mood, immune support and general wellbeing.

The fact remains that there are a number of people who should never be prescribed the oral contraceptive pill. Discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider thoroughly before deciding whether or not to take it.

■ *Leah Hechtman is a naturopath and fertility specialist. She is a lecturer, author, researcher and industry consultant and has her own clinical practice in Sydney, NSW. She specialises in fertility, reproductive and psychological health. For more information visit [www.naturalhealthfertility.com](http://www.naturalhealthfertility.com)*