

ANOTHER LOOK AT CONTRACEPTION

To some, the Catholic Church's consistent teaching against birth control may seem outdated. Yet with each passing year, evidence of contraception's negative consequences keeps piling up, revealing profound repercussions on women, children, families, and society.

Some Contraceptives Can Cause Early Abortions

Advocates of contraception claim it doesn't cause abortions. However, that claim rests on an inaccurate redefinition of "pregnancy" as beginning only *after* an embryo successfully implants in the mother's uterus. This, then, excludes from the meaning of abortion all pills and devices that cause the death of an embryo *before* implantation. Yet it's scientifically indisputable that a new human life begins when an embryo first forms at fertilization—6 to 8 days *before* implantation.

Physicians' textbooks and handbooks reveal that some types of contraception sometimes work by preventing a living, developing, embryonic baby from reaching the uterus and successfully implanting, which results in his or her death.

Physical Risks for Women

Contraception also presents significant health risks for women. Combined oral contraceptives (COCs), as well as contraceptive patches and the "ring," have long been known to cause cancer (of the breast, cervix, and liver).² They also substantially increase the risk of potentially life-threatening blood clots,³ which have resulted in heart attacks, strokes, and hundreds of deaths in healthy young women.

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Intrauterine devices (IUDs) present other risks. For example, the following are just some of the warnings by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about one common IUD: septic shock and death may occur in the event of pregnancy; about half of pregnancies are ectopic; the device may embed, perforate, or penetrate the uterine wall, resulting in its migration outside the [uterus], adhesions, peritonitis, intestinal perforation/obstruction, abscesses, and erosion of adjacent internal organs.

From Pill to Poverty

Without the contraceptive pill, the sexual revolution couldn't have happened. Few women were willing to risk pregnancy outside of marriage. Economist George Akerlof has shown how that dynamic abruptly changed with the contraceptive pill, leading to "the feminization of poverty."⁵

Told that the pill would prevent pregnancy, women had sex without the promise of marriage. Because women controlled the decision to contracept, give birth, or undergo abortion, however, many men reasoned that they were not responsible for children conceived outside marriage. Indicating men's denial of responsibility: "Shotgun marriages" soon plummeted, while out-of-wedlock births nearly tripled. In less than two decades (1965-1984), abortions among unmarried women grew from an annual 88,000 to 1,271,000.

Throughout the past decade, at least 40 percent of children each year are born to unmarried mothers who are often left struggling in poverty to raise children alone. According to Child Trends, "in 2015, 43 percent of children living in single-mother families were poor, compared with 10 percent of children living in married-couple families."⁶ Poverty and the absence of a child's biological father in the home are two of the strongest predictors of poor academic, emotional, and behavioral outcomes in children.

Contraception Is Unreliable

How could abortions and nonmarital births skyrocket if women are contracepting? With typical use, most contraceptives are far from reliable, especially for teens, who are twice as likely as adults to become pregnant while using contraceptive pills, patches, or rings.⁷ Every year, *one million* of the 11 million U.S. women on the pill become pregnant, and 40% of them undergo abortions.

What Does Our Catholic Faith Offer?

God's love is generous, sacrificial, life-giving, and forever. As humans made in God's image, we are called to imitate the eternal giving and receiving of love that is the Holy Trinity. We can do this in a unique way through marriage—a vowed communion of a man and a woman who enter a "one flesh" union open to bringing forth a new human life. "The whole meaning of marriage is present and signified"⁹ in each act of marital sex, so the love-giving and life-giving purposes of sex should not be separated.

At the same time, for serious reasons, in exercising responsible parenthood, a couple may "decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time."¹⁰ In these cases, "the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile."¹¹

Thanks to the research of countless doctors and scientists, modern, fertility awareness-based methods of natural family planning rival and even surpass¹² the effectiveness of contraceptives while posing no risks to mothers or unborn children. In fact, couples using such methods report better sex, improved communication, and the ability to identify underlying causes of infertility. (To learn more, visit www.foryourmarriage.org/family-planning.)

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