

CHAPTER

20

FAMILY PLANNING—
HAVING THE NUMBER
OF CHILDREN YOU WANT

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FAMILY PLANNING— HAVING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN YOU WANT

THIS FAMILY HAS MANY CHILDREN.



THIS FAMILY HAS FEW CHILDREN.



Some mothers and fathers want a lot of children. Where many children die young, parents feel they need a large number of children to help with work and to be sure some remain to care for them when they grow old.

Many mothers and fathers have come to realize that to have a large family may bring serious problems. For example:

- With many children it is harder to feed, clothe, and educate them all well.
- When a mother has child after child, without much space between, she often becomes weak. Her breasts produce less milk. Her babies are more likely to die (see p. 317). Also, after many pregnancies the danger is greater that she will die in childbirth, leaving many motherless children.
- If a man and woman have a lot of children, when the children grow up there may not be enough land for all of them to grow the food their families need. Children may begin to die of hunger. This is already happening in many areas.

Although most, if not all, hunger in the world today could be prevented if land and wealth were distributed fairly, the growing number of people is part of the problem. If people keep having big families, the day will come when there is not enough land or food to go around—even if people learn to share.

The situation will get better only when people—as individuals, as families, and as communities—come to understand the many factors affecting their health and take action for the good of their children and future generations.

FAMILY PLANNING AND BIRTH CONTROL



Different parents have different reasons for wanting to limit the size of their family. Some young parents may decide to delay having any children until they have worked and saved enough so that they can afford to care for them well. Some parents may decide that a small number of children is enough, and they never want more. Others may want to space their children several years apart, so that both the children and their mother will be healthier.

Family planning is having the number of children you want, when you want them.

When a man and woman decide when they want to have children, and when they do not, they can choose one of several methods to prevent the woman from becoming pregnant, for as long as she wishes. These are methods of *birth control* or *contraception*.

Couples who want children but are not able to have them should see page 288.

IS BIRTH CONTROL GOOD—AND IS IT SAFE?

1. Is it good?

In some parts of the world there has been a lot of discussion about whether different forms of birth control are good or are safe. Some religions have been against any form of birth control except trying not to have sex together. But an increasing number of religious leaders are realizing how important it is to the health and well-being of families and communities that people be able to use easier and surer methods of birth control.

Also, in many places women who get pregnant when they do not want a child will go for an *abortion*, to have the developing baby destroyed or removed. Where these intentional or **provoked abortions** are legal, they can be done in health centers under sanitary conditions, and they are not usually dangerous to the woman if done within three months. But many women get abortions done **secretly** often in dirty conditions and performed by unskilled persons. Thousands of women die from such abortions. If women are given the chance to use birth control methods, and information to use them wisely, most provoked abortions, would not be necessary. Much needless suffering and death could be prevented.

Some people feel that much of the push for family planning comes from rich countries or persons who want to keep their control over the poor by controlling their numbers. The rich and powerful find it hard to accept that the way they manage the earth's land and resources strongly contributes to world hunger. They see only the growing numbers of people. In some countries professionals sterilize poor women by force or experiment on them with new or unsafe methods. For all these reasons social reformers and spokesmen for the poor often protest against birth control.

This is unfortunate. The object of attack should not be birth control, but rather its misuse. The attack should be against social injustice and the unfair distribution of land and wealth. If used well, birth control can in fact help the poor gain strength to work for their basic human rights. But the decisions and responsibility for family planning must be in the hands of the people themselves.

**Decide for yourself if and how you want to plan your family.
Do not let anyone else decide for you.**

2. Is it safe?

Whether or not different forms of birth control are safe has been much discussed. Often those who are against birth control for religious or political reasons try to scare women by talking about the risks. Some methods do have certain risks. However, the important thing all women should realize is that **birth control is safer than pregnancy**, especially after a woman has had many children.















The risk of serious illness or death resulting from pregnancy is many times greater than the risks involved in using any of the common methods of birth control.

There is much talk about the risks of taking birth control pills (oral contraceptives). But the risks with pregnancy are many times greater. The pill works so well in preventing pregnancy that for most women it is safer—in terms of protecting their lives—than any of the other 'less risky' but less effective methods.

CHOOSING A METHOD OF BIRTH CONTROL

On the following pages several methods of birth control are described. Some work better for some people than others. Study these pages, and talk with your midwife, health worker, or doctor about what methods are available and are likely to work best for you. Differences in **effectiveness, safety, convenience, availability,** and **cost** should be considered. Husbands and wives should decide together, and share the responsibility.

AVERAGE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF BIRTH CONTROL

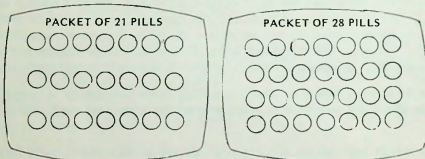
Of each 20 women using this method . . .	on the average this many are likely to get pregnant in spite of the method . . .	and this many must (or should) stop the method because of problems.
PILL		
CONDOM		
DIAPHRAGM		
FOAM		
I. U. D.		
PULLING OUT		
STERILIZATION		*
Sponge		
RHYTHM		COMBINED
MUCUS		

* With sterilization, problems occasionally result from surgery but the method is permanent.

BIRTH CONTROL PILLS (ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES)

When taken correctly, the 'pill' is one of the most effective methods for avoiding pregnancy. However, certain women should not take birth control pills if they can use another method (see p.334). If possible, birth control pills should be given by health workers, midwives, or other persons trained in their use.

The pills usually come in packets of 21 or 28 tablets. The packets of 21 are often less expensive, and of these, some brands are cheaper than others. The amount of medicine differs in different brands. To pick the kind that is right for you, see the GREEN PAGES, page 380.



How to take the pills—packet of 21:

Take the first pill on the fifth day from the beginning of your period, counting the first day of the period as day 1. Then take 1 pill every day until the packet is finished (21 days).

After finishing the packet, wait 7 days before taking any more pills. Then begin another packet, 1 pill each day.

This way, you will take the pills for 3 weeks out of each month, then go 1 week without taking any. Normally, the menstrual period will come during the week when the pill is not taken. Even if the period does not come, start the new packet 7 days after finishing the last one.

If you do not want to get pregnant, it is important to take the pills as directed —1 every day. If you forget to take the pill one day, take 2 the next day.

Packet of 28 pills:

Take the first pill on the fifth day of the period, just as with the packets of 21. Take 1 a day. Seven of the pills will probably be a different size and color. Take these pills last (one a day) after the others have all been taken. The day after you finish the packet of 28, start another packet. Take 1 a day without ever missing a day, packet after packet, for as long as you do not want to become pregnant.

No special diet must be followed when taking the pill. Even if you happen to get sick with a cold or something else while taking birth control pills, go right on taking them. If you stop taking the pills before the packet is used up, you may become pregnant.

Side effects:

Some women get a little morning sickness, swelling of the breasts, or other signs of pregnancy when they first start taking the pill. This is because the pill contains the same chemicals (hormones) that a woman's body puts into her blood when she is pregnant. These signs do not mean she is unhealthy or should stop taking the pill. They usually go away after the first 2 or 3 months. To relieve morning sickness, see page 294.

Some women may bleed a different amount than usual in their monthly period when they are taking the pill. These changes are usually not important. Sometimes they can be corrected by changing to a brand with a different amount of hormone. This is discussed in the GREEN PAGES (p.426).

"Is it dangerous to take oral contraceptives?"

Like all medicines, birth control pills occasionally cause serious problems in certain persons (see next pages). The most serious problems related to the pill are blood clots in the heart, lungs, or brain (see stroke, p. 373). **However, the chance of getting dangerous clots is even higher when women get pregnant than when they take the pill.**

Death related to taking the pill is rare. On the average, pregnancy and child-birth are 50 times as dangerous as taking the pill.

Of 15,000 women who become pregnant, 75 are likely to die from problems of pregnancy or childbirth.



Of 15,000 women who take birth control pills, only 1 is likely die from problems related to having taken the pills.



Conclusion:

IT IS MUCH SAFER TO TAKE THE PILL THAN TO BECOME PREGNANT.

For most women, birth control pills are relatively safe. Certainly they are far safer than becoming pregnant. However, **for some women both pregnancy and taking birth control pills have a higher risk.** These women should use other methods of birth control.

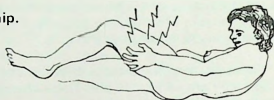


Who Should Not Take Birth Control Pills?

A woman who has any of the following signs should **not** take oral (or injected) contraceptives:

- **Deep or steady pain in one leg or hip.**

This may be caused by an inflamed vein (phlebitis or blood clot). Do not use birth control pills. (Women with **varicose veins** that are not inflamed can usually take birth control pills without problems. But they should stop taking them if the veins become inflamed.)



- **Stroke.** A woman who has had any signs of a stroke (p. 373) should not take the pill.



- **Hepatitis (p. 209), cirrhosis (p. 374), or other liver disease.**

Women with these problems, or whose eyes had a yellow color during pregnancy, should not take the pill. It is better not to take oral contraceptives for one year after having hepatitis.



- **Cancer.** If you have had or suspect cancer of the breast or womb, do not use oral contraceptives. Before beginning oral contraceptives, examine your breasts carefully (see p. 325). In some health centers you may also be able to get a simple test (Pap smear) to check for cancer of the *cervix* or opening of the womb. Birth control pills do not cause cancer, but if cancer of the breasts or womb already exists, the pill can make it worse.



- **A woman who is breast feeding her baby should not take birth control pills.**

Some health problems may be made worse by oral contraceptives. If you have any of the following problems, it is better to use another method if you can:

- **Migraine** (p. 199). Women who suffer from true migraine should not take oral contraceptives. But simple headache that goes away with aspirin is no reason not to take the pill.
- **Urinary infection with swelling of the feet** (p. 278).
- **Heart disease** (p. 371).
- **A great deal of blood loss during the menstrual period.**

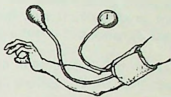
If you suffer from asthma, tuberculosis, diabetes, or epilepsy, it is best to get medical advice before taking birth control pills. However, most women with these diseases can take oral contraceptives without harm.

Precautions Women Should Take when Using Birth Control Pills

1. Examine the breasts carefully every month for lumps or possible signs of cancer (see page 325).



2. Have your blood pressure measured every 6 months.



3. Watch for any of the problems mentioned on page 334, especially:

- Severe and frequent migraine headaches (p. 199).
- Dizziness, headache, or loss of consciousness that results in difficulty in seeing, speaking, or moving part of the face or body (see Stroke, p. 373).
- Pain with inflammation in a leg or hip (chance of a blood clot).
- Severe or repeated pain in the chest (see Heart Problems, p. 371).

If one of these problems develops, stop taking the pill and get medical advice. Avoid pregnancy by using another method, as these problems also make pregnancy especially dangerous.

Questions and Answers about Birth Control Pills

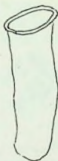
	Some people claim birth control pills cause cancer. Is this true?	No! However, if cancer of the breast or womb already exists, taking the pill may make the tumor grow faster.
?	Can a woman have children again if she stops taking the pill?	Yes. (Sometimes there is a delay of a month or 2 before she can become pregnant.)
	Is the chance of having twins or defective children greater if a woman has used oral contraceptives?	No. The chances are the same as for women who have not taken the pill.
	Is it true that a mother's breasts will dry up if she starts taking birth control pills?	Most women are not affected. But some mothers produce less milk, or stop making it altogether, when they start taking the pill.
	For this reason it is a good idea for women who are breast feeding to use another method of birth control during the first 6 months, and then change to the pill.	

For information on birth control pills, see the Green Pages—p. 425.

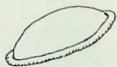
OTHER METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL

THE CONDOM (also called 'prophylactic', 'rubber', or sheath) is a narrow rubber or latex bag that the man wears on his penis while having sex. Usually it works well to prevent pregnancy. It also helps prevent spreading of venereal diseases, but is not a complete safeguard.

You can buy condoms in most pharmacies. Some are cheaper than others. Before using it, fill it with water to make sure it does not leak.



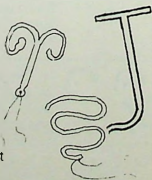
THE DIAPHRAGM is a shallow cup made of soft rubber. A woman wears it in her vagina while having sexual relations. It should be left in for at least 6 hours afterward. It is a fairly sure method—especially if used together with a contraceptive cream or jelly. A health worker or midwife should help fit the diaphragm, as different women need different sizes. Check the diaphragm regularly for holes and get a new one each year. They are not expensive.



CONTRACEPTIVE FOAM comes in a tube or can. The woman puts it into her vagina with a special applicator. It must be applied no longer than 1 hour before having sex, and left in for at least 6 hours afterward. The application should be repeated before each time the couple has sex, even if this is several times in one night. It is a fairly sure method if used correctly, but a nuisance.



THE INTRAUTERINE DEVICE (IUD) is a plastic (or sometimes metal) object that a specially trained health worker or midwife places inside the womb. While in the womb, it prevents pregnancy. IUDs fall out of some women. After every menstrual period check if the IUD is still in place. In other women they cause pain, discomfort, and sometimes serious problems, but for some women they give no trouble at all. For these women, the IUD may be the simplest and most economical method.



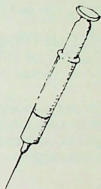
WITHDRAWAL OR PULLING OUT (COITUS INTERRUPTUS) is a method in which the man pulls his penis out of the woman before the sperm comes. This method is perhaps better than none, but is disturbing to the couple and does not always work, because some sperm often leaks out ahead of time and can cause pregnancy.

Menstrual Regulation: If a woman thinks she is pregnant, she can get menstrual regulation done **within 10 days of missing her periods**, at a health centre. Do not use this as a birth control method. Use another method which can prevent pregnancy.

METHODS FOR THOSE WHO NEVER WANT TO HAVE MORE CHILDREN

INJECTIONS. There are special injections to prevent pregnancy. *Depo-Provera* is one. An injection is usually given every 3 months. Sometimes women cannot become pregnant ever again after they have had these injections, so generally only women who will never want more children should use this method. Side effects and precautions are similar to those for birth control pills.

Injections are useful for women who are sure they do not ever want to become pregnant again—especially those who have trouble remembering to take pills or for other reasons have difficulty taking them.



STERILIZATION. For those who never want to have more children, there are fairly safe, simple operations for both men and women. In our country these operations are free. Ask at the health center.

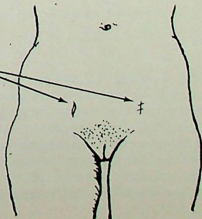
- For men, the operation is called a vasectomy. It can be done in a doctor's office or a health center. Small cuts are made here so that the tubes from the man's testicles can be cut and tied.

The operation has no effect at all on the man's sexual ability or pleasure. His fluid comes just the same, but has no sperm in it.



- For women, the operation is called a tubal ligation, which means to tie the tubes. It can be done simply and quickly, and usually without putting the woman to sleep. One method is to make very small cuts in the lower belly so that the tubes coming from the ovaries, or egg-makers, can be cut and tied.

This operation has no effect on the women's menstrual periods or sexual ability, and may make having sex more pleasant because she does not have to worry about becoming pregnant.



HOME METHODS FOR PREVENTING PREGNANCY

Every land has 'home remedies' for preventing or interrupting pregnancy. Unfortunately, most either do not work or are dangerous. For example, some women think that to wash out the vagina or to urinate after having sex will prevent pregnancy, **but this is not true.**

THE SPONGE METHOD. Here is a home method that is not harmful and sometimes works. You cannot be sure it will prevent pregnancy every time, but it can be used when no other method is available.

You will need a sponge and either **vinegar, lemons, or salt.** Either a sea sponge or an artificial sponge will work. If you do not have a sponge, try a ball of cotton, or soft cloth.

- Mix:

2 tablespoons vinegar in 1 cup water

or

1 teaspoon lemon juice in 1 cup water

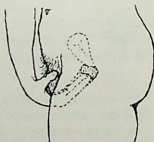
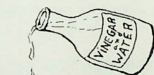
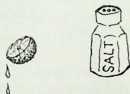
or

1 spoon of salt in 4 spoons water

- Wet the sponge with one of these liquids.
- Push the wet sponge deep into your vagina before having sex. You can put it in up to an hour before.
- Leave the sponge in at least 6 hours after having sex. Then take it out. If you have trouble getting it out, next time tie a ribbon or piece of string to it that you can pull.

The sponge can be washed and used again, many times.

You can make up the liquid in advance and keep it in a bottle.



BREAST FEEDING. While a woman is breast feeding her baby she is less likely to become pregnant—especially when breast milk is the only food her baby receives. The chance of her becoming pregnant is much greater after 4 to 6 months, when the baby begins to get other foods in addition to breast milk. To be more sure she will not become pregnant, the mother who is breast feeding should begin some method of birth control when the baby is 3 to 4 months old. The earlier she begins the surer it will be. (Before the baby is 6 months old, a method other than birth control pills is better because the pills cause some women to produce less milk.)

METHODS THAT DO NOT WORK VERY WELL

THE RHYTHM METHOD:

This method is not very sure to prevent pregnancy, but it has the advantage of not costing anything. It is more likely to work for a woman whose periods come very regularly, more or less once every 28 days. Also, the husband and wife must be willing to pass one week out of each month without having sex the regular way.

Usually a woman has a chance of becoming pregnant only during 8 days of her monthly cycle—her 'fertile days'. These 8 days come midway between her periods, beginning 10 days after the first day of menstrual bleeding. To avoid getting pregnant, a woman should not have sex with her man during these 8 days. During the rest of the month, she is not likely to get pregnant.

To avoid confusion the woman should mark on a calendar the 8 days she is not to have sex.

For example: Suppose your period begins on the 5th day of May.

Mark it like this:

MAY						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Then count 10 days. Starting with the 10th day, put a line under the 8 days that follow, like this:

During these 8 'fertile days', do not have sexual relations.

Now suppose your next period begins on the first of June. Mark it the same way, like this:

JUNE						
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Once again count off 10 days and underline the following 8 days in which you will not have sexual contact.

If the woman and her husband carefully avoid having sex together during these 8 days each month, it is possible that they will go years without having another child. However, few couples are successful for very long. This is not a very sure method, unless used in combination with another method such as a diaphragm or condoms.

THE MUCUS METHOD

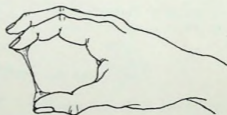
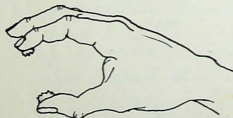
This is a variation of the rhythm method that is being encouraged by some religious groups. It works fairly well for some people but not for others. In general it cannot be considered a very sure way of preventing pregnancy, but it costs nothing and has no other risks than those that come with pregnancy itself.

Every day, except during her period, the woman should examine the mucus from her vagina.

Take a little mucus out of your vagina with a clean finger and try to make it stretch between your thumb and forefinger, like this:

As long as the mucus is sticky like paste—not slippery or slimy—you probably cannot become pregnant, and can continue to have sexual relations.

When the mucus begins to get slippery or slimy, like raw egg, or if it stretches between your fingers, you may become pregnant if you have sexual relations—so **do not have sex when the mucus is slippery or stretches.**



The mucus will usually become slippery during a few days midway between your periods. These are the same days you would not have sex with your man if you were using the rhythm method.

To be more sure, use the mucus and rhythm methods together. To be still more sure, see below.

Combined Methods:

If you want to be more certain not to become pregnant, it often helps to use 2 methods at the same time. The rhythm or mucus method combined with the use of a condom, diaphragm, foam, or sponge is surer than any of these methods alone. Likewise, if a man uses condoms and the woman a diaphragm or foam, the chance of pregnancy is very low.

**Strength lies not in numbers, but in having enough to eat.
Consider planning your family.**

The book *Where There Is No Doctor* is available at Rs 29/- plus postage. Multiple copies of reprints of various chapters are also available.

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