

Sifting Through Contraception Options and How They Work

Contraception, also known as birth control, is meant to prevent the fertilization of the egg during ovulation, thereby preventing pregnancy. But, there are so many contraception choices available to women that it is hard to choose the best method. By understanding how each one works, it becomes easier for a woman to choose the right one for her. Aside from abstinence, ovulation timing and sterilization, there are three basic methods for preventing pregnancy.

- 1. Hormonal Methods-** “The Pill” is the original hormonal method of birth control. Since its development, several other methods have been introduced. There are also shots, patches, implants and rings that basically do the same thing. All of these methods use hormones to disrupt ovulation.

In the pill, estrogen and progestin hormones are introduced into the body orally. They halt ovulation cycle by preventing mature eggs from dropping down the fallopian tube and attaching to the uterine wall.

Other forms like the shot, patch, implant and ring also release hormones into the body that stop this process from occurring. The frequency of treatment can be daily like with the pill, weekly, monthly or years like the implants.

The downside to hormonal methods is the side effects from introducing synthetic hormones into the body. While they are generally safe to use, there are risks such as blood clots, weight gain and stroke.

- 2. Barrier Methods-** This method includes condoms, both male and female, the diaphragm and the sponge. They prevent the sperm from reaching the mature egg by blocking the way. Spermicides are often used with these to further prevent pregnancy. Sponges and condoms can be purchased over the counter, but a doctor must fit a woman with a diaphragm.

These are effective methods of birth control and have the fewest side effects. They may cause some discomfort or lack of sensation. Another aggravation is stopping to put the device in or on before intercourse. The element of spontaneity is compromised.

Problems that may occur are incorrect placement or unknown damage to the barrier device. Sperm is very tiny and can get through any vulnerable spots.

- 3. IUDs-** These are also hormonal, though they are devices implanted into the uterus by a physician. It is a ‘T’ shape device that is placed in the uterus and it releases progestin which prevents the egg from dropping. It also makes it difficult for the egg to attach to the uterine wall if it does drop. Another device releases copper which serves the same purpose. These are good for 5 years and should be changed at that time.

It is important to note that none of these methods are 100% effective. Antibiotics and other medicines can change the efficacy of the hormonal methods and improper placement or damage to the product can affect the barrier devices. IUDs can always be expelled unnoticed, especially in women who have never had children or had it implanted right after child-birth. Also, the only method that protects against sexually transmitted

diseases is the condom. So, unless a woman is in a monogamous relationship, the male partner should always wear one.

Please call GAMA and ask to speak to Dr. Yessenow to discuss contraceptive options.