

SEXtalk)))

Answers to Your Questions about Sex and Relationships

Have a ??? Email sextalk@u.arizona.edu

factoid

The favorite birth control method of college students nationwide is "the pill," followed by condoms (1997 Details Magazine College Sex Survey, n=1752)

Q. I recently started taking the pill (Ortho Tri-Cyclen). I have a family history of high blood pressure and diabetes. I've heard the pill can cause high blood pressure, and that people with diabetes should not take it. Right now, I don't have either of these problems, but could the pill cause them or make my chances of getting them greater since they are already present in my family?

A. While both estrogens and progestins (hormones present in some oral contraceptives) may affect blood pressure, it is extremely rare that an individual would develop high blood pressure as a result of taking "the pill." However, since you have a family history of hypertension, it would be advisable for you to have your blood pressure checked after 3 months on the pill, and every year thereafter. It's important to note that women with hypertension can still take "the pill" -- but they should do so under a doctor's care and should avoid cigarettes since smoking increases the likelihood of heart disease and stroke.

Regarding diabetes, some studies suggest that progestins and progesterone (also present in some OC's) may increase the body's resistance to insulin, leading to glucose intolerance. Recent research, however, has shown minimal or no change in glucose tolerance in women using low-dose OC's (such as Ortho Tri-Cyclen). Consider having your glucose level tested after 3 months on the pill, and every year thereafter. As with hypertension, women with diabetes may still take "the pill" as long as it is a low-dose OC and they do not have a history of vascular disease.

Overall, if you are a young woman in good health, and there are no risk factors involved such as smoking or obesity, it is highly unlikely that "the pill" would cause high blood pressure or diabetes. However, if you are concerned about the OC you are using or develop one of the health conditions discussed above, it is important that you see your health care provider immediately.

*References: Contraceptive Technology, 17th Edition. (Hatcher et al.)
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