

sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

wildfact

Campus Health Pharmacy carries 20 brands of oral contraceptives.

Q Is it true that hormonal contraceptives “kill” sexual desire, sensual arousal, and reduce lubrication?

A. The short answer is... there is no short answer.

Many women experience increased sexual desire when they take oral contraceptives because they no longer fear getting pregnant. Still, some women do report decreased desire when using “the pill.”

Sexual desire, or libido, is a physiological and psychological phenomenon. Libido is, in part, determined by circulating levels of testosterone (an androgen that occurs in both men and women). Oral contraceptives, containing ethinyl estradiol (an estrogen) decrease testosterone levels. Low testosterone has been correlated with decreased libido in some, but not all, studies. What this fact really means is undetermined because there is no specific level of testosterone associated with low sexual desire in women who use oral contraceptives or women in general.

For women who do feel diminished sexual desire, use of a progestin-only pill (sometimes called the mini-pill) can be an alternative to consider. Because the mini-pill does not contain ethinyl estradiol, it does not decrease testosterone levels. However, this contraceptive pill offers less room for error (in regard to pregnancy protection) and requires the user to take the pill at a set time each day. Typically, women occasionally miss

doses... which could lead to a greater fear of pregnancy... which could lead to decreased sexual desire.

As for vaginal dryness or lubrication, the use of oral contraceptives increases cervical mucus, which is just one component of the secretions that make up vaginal lubrication. Interestingly, the Nuva-Ring, a vaginal hormonal contraceptive containing an estrogen and a progestin, is known to increase vaginal wetness, most likely due to an increase in the “good” flora of the vaginal tract.

Reduced libido may also be caused by other factors and other medications. Stress, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and interpersonal conflicts may contribute to a lack of interest in sex. In addition, many antidepressant medications are known to squelch sexual desire. If your libido continues to lag, you may want to consult your medical provider.

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References: *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *Journal of Women's Health and Gender Based Medicine*.



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