

# Protect yourself from pregnancy

by Sarah Orr  
health page editor

With products like Orthotricyclen, Depo Provera, and even the "morning after" pill on the market, there is no shortage of ways to prevent pregnancy. With Valentine's Day looming in just a few weeks, couples everywhere are planning to celebrate with romantic evenings.

There are pros and cons to using an oral contraceptive or shot. Ultimately the choice is up to the user, and it should be used in combination with another form of birth control and under the supervision of a medical doctor or nurse practitioner. The pill is a popular form of birth control used by many college-aged women. Usually a four-week "pack" is given to the user and one pill is taken at the same time daily in succession until the pack is completed. Some benefits of this method include cost, ease of use, and privacy. Some pill manufacturers claim that products may clear up mild to moderate acne problems as well.

The pill must be prescribed for the user by a health professional. An overall physical examination will be administered prior to prescription to ensure that physical health is at the optimum level for usage. The pill prevents pregnancy by maintaining a steady level of hormones at the mid-cycle, which prevents ovulation.

The birth control pill can have a very high effectiveness rating, approximately 99.6 percent, if used

correctly. To put it in layman's terms, one in 100 women will get pregnant during one year of using the pill. Those are very good odds alone, but who likes to take chances? Use it with another form of birth control, and you are virtually full proof.

However, as with any medication, there are possible side effects that the user needs to be aware of if she is going to use the product, and the birth control pill is no exception. Some are minor side effects. During the first two to three months on the pill, nausea may be experienced. A slight weight gain or loss may also take place in some users or an increase in breast size. Some of these phenomena can be explained by water retention. Fluid retention in the breasts contributes to fullness and tenderness. However, the weight gain will most likely remain as long as the woman continues to use this method of birth control.

Sometimes bleeding or slight spotting may occur between periods. This happens to some women in the first couple months after they start using the pill. Some women may also miss periods or have very light ones. As long as you have not missed a pill, then this can be normal. If you did miss one, you may want to check with a clinic or doctor. Variations in the skin complexion may also be a minor side effect. Many women have seen dramatic improvements in skin complexion. However, others can

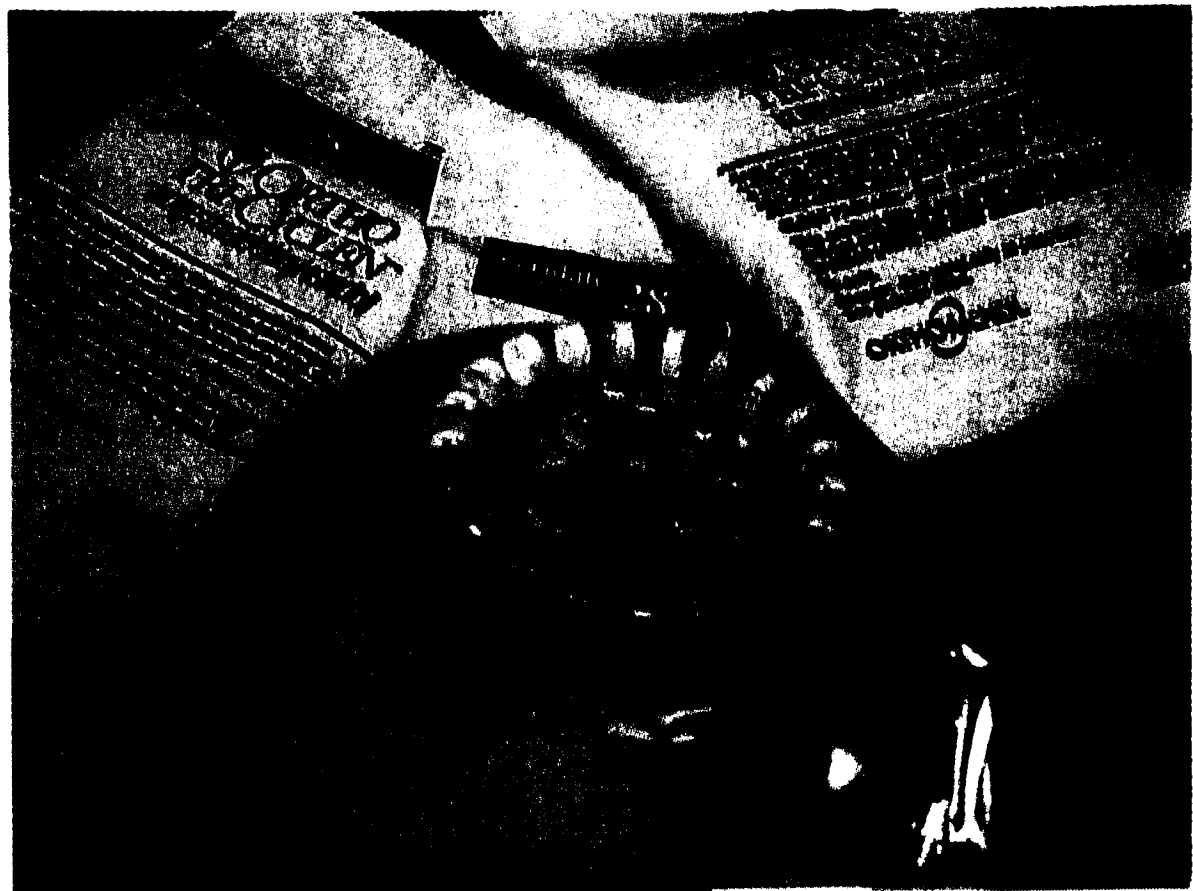


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Orthotricyclen is a popular form of the birth control pill among college-aged women.

develop severe acne or changes in the pigmentation of the skin. Mood swings, fatigue, decreased sex drive, and depression are just an array of many of the minor side effects that may take place.

More serious side effects such as persistent or severe abdominal pain, chest pain, shortness of breath, worsened headaches, blurred vision,

dizziness, blindness, or caustic leg pain should be dealt with immediately. Call a doctor or health care professional.

Be aware that some seizure medications and possibly antibiotics may decrease the effectiveness of the birth control pill. Make sure to use a back up form of birth control if you have an infection or illness that

requires the prescription of antibiotics. Continue to use it for at least two weeks after finishing the antibiotics. The birth control pill isn't for everyone. There are other forms of birth control on the market that may be better suited to your needs. Research your options extensively, and consult a physician before beginning the use of any contraceptive.

# STD: Stop the terrible danger

by Ryan Anthony  
staff writer

You have seen the pamphlets and brochures everywhere, but it is doubtful you have actually picked one up to look at it. Sitting there in the Health and Wellness office, you may have been curious about the little booklet titled, "STDs," but a bit too embarrassed to actually pick it up and peruse it. If you want to know, but are too shy to ask, read on. The following paragraphs will give you some quick facts about the most common sexually transmitted diseases.

A sexually transmitted disease is an infection spread by the transfer of organisms from one person to another during sexual contact. American teenagers are having a lot of sex. So much sex, that every 13 seconds, one of those teenagers contracts an STD. That adds up to more than four million new cases each year. Two thirds of the 15 million Americans infected with an STD each year are under 25 years of age.

If you have had your share of sexual experiences but never showed any effects of an STD, there is a chance

you are not as healthy as you think.

Because most STDs have no immediate symptoms, it could be wise for anyone who is sexually active to have a test done. Most, but not all, STDs are curable, and it is a good idea to be positive that you are disease free before you pass something along to another unknowing partner.

What if you find you are infected with an STD? Here is some information about some common STDs:

**HEPATITIS B:** About one of 20 people in the U.S. will become infected with hepatitis B, which is spread through the exchange of body fluids. It is common for people to receive a vaccine against the disease, but if you contract it, you may experience flu-like symptoms, as well as loss of appetite and extreme fatigue. Many people infected show no symptoms at all.

**CHLAMYDIA:** Chlamydia is the most common STD in the U.S. and fortunately, it is also one of the most easy to cure. Unfortunately, most sufferers of this disease show no symptoms which can cause

infertility and painful urination. If left untreated, women may also experience pelvic inflammatory disease and ectopic pregnancy. If you test positive, an antibiotic is used as a quick treatment.

**GONORRHEA:** Gonorrhea affects almost a million people each year. Males with the disease experience a painful discharge during urination while women may have no symptoms at all, though some women have a painful yellow or bloody discharge during urination. Females with this disease face the similar long-term effects as those who have chlamydia, so it is not surprising that these two diseases often come together. Penicillin is used as a treatment, but gonorrhea is difficult to cure.

**SYPHILIS:** One of the world's oldest known diseases, syphilis occurs in four dangerous stages. In the first, symptoms come and go without treatment. The second stage consists of little or no symptoms at all. However, in those who do develop symptoms, sores and rashes with active bacteria can develop on the skin, making infection to other people very easy. This stage can

show headaches, fevers, and sore throats as well. In the third stage, syphilis becomes dormant for 10 to 25 years until the final stage. In this fourth stage, bacteria attack the heart, eyes, brain, and nervous system. Pregnant women can pass this disease along to the fetus, sometimes causing stillbirth. Syphilis is treatable with antibiotics.

**HERPES:** Half a million new herpes cases are developed each year. It is a viral infection that passes easily from contact with an open sore. The virus can be spread from a sore to a hand to the genitals or mouth. Symptoms include burning, itching, or tingling in the genital area. Then, sores develop in the infected areas and remain for 14-28 days. There is no cure for herpes, so sufferers of this disease should expect their sores to appear and disappear 1-6 times per year.

**HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV):** HPV affects more than one million Americans each year. Also known as genital warts, HPV sufferers develop pink, white, or gray cauliflower-like warts on or around the genitals. Though there is no cure for the disease, the warts can be

removed with a good chance of them reappearing.

STDs, though sometimes difficult to detect, can be dangerous. Having one STD increases your chances of contracting other STDs, as well as forms of cancer. Condoms help reduce the risk of contracting an STD, but, of course, abstinence is the best way of avoiding them. Even if you show no symptoms, but have had sexual contact with your share of people, you may benefit from an STD test. Find out if you are one of the one in three people who contract an STD by the time they are 24 years old.



# Kick the cold and flu season

by Nicky Galloway  
staff writer

Sneezing, coughing, feverish, nauseous? This time you're probably not suffering from a late night binge, but instead, you have fallen victim to the flu. The flu virus is spreading fast at the Penn State Behrend, but there are ways of preventing the flu. The flu can keep people sick for one to two weeks, so prevention and early detection are the keys to battling this virus.

Symptoms begin with high temperatures and body aches. These symptoms precede a variety of symptoms including a runny nose and cough.

Because the flu is caused by a virus, someone suffering from the flu has to let the virus work its way throughout the body. The only thing that can be done for someone suffering from the flu is to treat the symptoms by making the patient more comfortable. Basically, that means keeping the fever down and hydrat-

ing the body. Therefore, it is extremely essential that the flu victim drink an abundance of water and other liquids.

If you think you might have the flu, stop by the Health and Wellness Center in the Carriage House. If the flu is caught within the first 24 to 48 hours, a prescription drug can be administered. This drug shortens the severity and duration of the flu. Patty McMahon, the nurse practitioner and director of the Health and Wellness Center, claims the drug "works wonders." The next day, the patient already feels the effects of the drug and feels much better.

There are ways to prevent contracting the flu virus. The virus is spread through the air. If someone who has the flu sits down at an area, the germs are deposited at that spot. Then if a healthy person would sit down in the same space, touch the area where the sick person was, and then touch their own mucus membranes, that person would get the flu virus. To prevent this from occurring, people should

wash their hands often, cover their nose when coughing and sneezing, and avoid touching their face.

The most important thing is to get adequate rest. This is the hardest thing for college students to accomplish. The body needs eight to 10 hours of sleep to regenerate energy for the upcoming day. If this amount of sleep would occur every night, the student would have more energy to go about his or her daily activities. It would be to students' benefit to schedule eight to 10 hours of sleep along with homework, school, and extra-curricular activities. It would prevent the contraction of the flu virus and give the student a bit more energy every day.

However, if you have fallen victim to "the bug" get the proper medical assistance immediately. In addition to the local doctor, the Health and Wellness Center on campus will provide a complete diagnosis of the seasonal malady, as well as numerous other illnesses and problems that occur.



PHOTO BY BECKY WEINDORF

Don't let this happen to you! Taking the proper precautions can help you avoid the sniffles and flu this season.



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