

# Pill's side effects are

by B.J. Sibbald  
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1981 marks the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the birth control pill to North America. In 1961 the pill was marketed after being tested on only 132 Puerto Rican women. Not surprisingly, 20 years later new side effects from the pill are still being discovered.

Some argue that the 90 million women on the pill around are part of a huge experiment. Others say in most cases the pill is safe, and enough research has been done. No one knows for sure.

"It's time women took the responsibility for birth control out of their doctors' hands and back into their own," says Anne-Marie Smart, organizer for The Women as Reproducers group. "Women think they are choosing the most effective method but they aren't taking all things into consideration. We have to ask ourselves if the side effects are worth it. We have to stop letting ourselves be used as guinea pigs."

The list of possible side effects associated with the pill is long and frightening: blood clots, heart attacks, headaches, chemical diabetes, loss of libido, depression, nausea, urinary tract infection, vaginitis, sterility, breast change, weight gain and skin problems are some of the known side effects. The list grows every year.

According to Doctor Linda Coll at the Carleton University Health Services, the more serious side effects are rare and usually only come about if some other risk factor is involved.

"The pill is only one risk factor," she said. "If the use of the pill is combined with things like smoking, diabetes, lack of exercise, hypertension, increased age or obesity, then the risk of major side effects increases. Depending in the overall picture, a doctor can assess the risks an individual is taking."

The statistics on pill-related side effects vary depending upon who is doing the study.

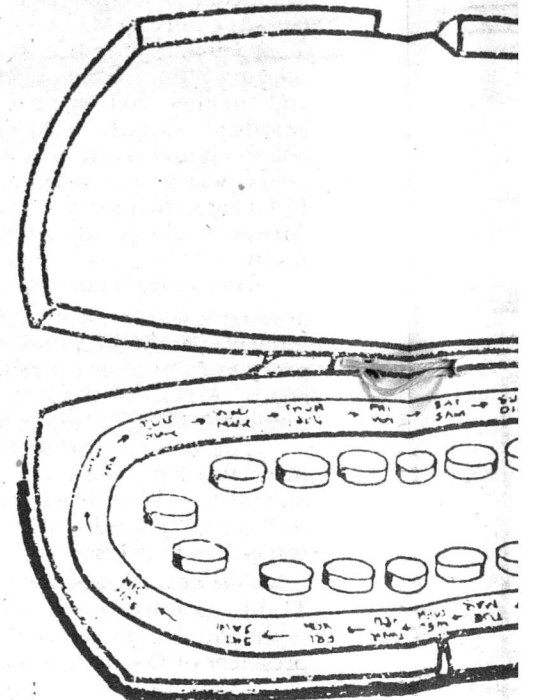
For drug companies, the pill is big

bucks, with 90 million women paying between \$3.50 and \$7.00 a month for it. Nevertheless the companies admit in a warning pamphlet enclosed in each packet that "In a small number of women potentially serious side effects may occur."

The problem is, as Smart points out, is that the vast majority of studies are done by drug companies because they have the money. It is in their best interest to downplay the risks.

Doctors Barbara Seaman and Gideon Seaman, in the book, *Women and the Crisis in Sex Hormones* examine a wide range of studies done by a variety of doctors and come up with figures that show more than just a few women are affected:

- 5 percent of pill users get high blood pressure;
- 13 percent get chemical diabetes;
- 30 percent get mild to severe depression;
- 5 percent are infertile — and sometimes permanently sterile — when



they stop. While the risks associated with taking the pill have been reduced over the years, they haven't disappeared. When the pill was first introduced it contained massive doses of synthetic estrogen and progesterone hormones that ti pills co Th contain less, bu cranc

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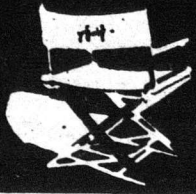
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