

How Birth Control Sabotaged My Marriage

A newlywed finds another reason to follow Church teaching

By Marissa Audia-Raymo

We were fighting...a lot. Every day, the same thing: me yelling, him yelling back; lying back-to-back at night, only to wake up and start the process all over again. I was feeling sick all the time; plagued by constant exhaustion, sometimes sleeping over twelve hours and waking up tired again. You might be thinking, “nausea, fatigue, lack of sex drive— typical signs of aging.” But for a 22 year-old newlywed, it was anything but normal.

I was sure it was hypothyroidism. A tendency to this condition runs in my family, and the symptoms fit. When I went to the doctor, I told her my thoughts, and gave blood to confirm my own diagnosis. When I called for my results, I was surprised to find that I was perfectly healthy!

Why would I be feeling so bad if all the tests came up clear? I began to reflect on the changes in my life in the past few months: new home, new marriage, new job, no more school...and finally it hit me. Just weeks before my wedding, I had asked the doctor to change one medication to a lower dosage because the side effects were making me a bit loopy. This medication, which had been prescribed years earlier to take care of strong cramping and irregular periods, was a birth control pill. I had tried several times previously to wean myself off of “the pill” to avoid long-term side effects, but each time after my face started breaking out and my cramps increased ten-fold, I started taking it again.

Finally, after a change in insurance and a significant increase in my co-pay, I took myself off the pill cold turkey. Within days, I felt like myself again. It was not until I was freed from these chemicals that I truly started to understand the effects of birth control on my marriage. The pre-marriage course our church offered spent time discussing Natural Family Planning. We had discussed how contraceptives can cause people to see their spouses as an object for pleasure only, and how it can reduce a woman’s length of fertility. And although my then-fiancé and I agreed that we would like to learn more about NFP, one of the requirements for taking the class was to be

off all artificial forms of birth control. I was too nervous to let go of the medication that had gotten me

through the past few years, seemingly pain and worry free, so I had not taken the class.

I started researching the Catholic perspective on birth control. I found that the most quoted source is *Humanae Vitae*, a document by Pope Paul VI that talks about the moral responsibility of humans to procreate, and how any action intended to prevent procreation is forbidden. He also stressed that the act of marital love is still valuable when it does not produce a child, but that it must “retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life.” (*Humanae Vitae*, n.11). While this helped me understand why contraception was wrong, what really impressed me personally was that studies have shown that the divorce rate for couples who use Natural Family Planning are less than five percent, when the national divorce rate is over fifty percent.

Although my medication was most often prescribed as a contraceptive, I wasn’t using it for that purpose and felt that since my intentions were good, I would not be violating any moral standards by continuing to regulate my cycle through the pill. Nowhere in my research or in my pre-marital class did I find any mention of using birth control for irregular periods. So I rationalized my dependency and I made my own rules. But I guess God had another plan for me.

We’ve all heard that the Lord works in mysterious ways, and I suppose we’ve all experienced it at some point. Quite honestly, I can’t think of another explanation for the sequence of events that brought on my moral epiphany. I changed medications about three weeks before my wedding; the symptoms began the first week of my new marriage. The doctor had given me a couple of months worth of samples, so by the time I finally realized that it was this that was causing my symptoms, I was ready for a refill anyway. When I called the pharmacy to refill the old prescription, I was told that my husband’s insurance



required a steep \$40 co-pay for each month's refill. This caught my attention. Some might call the timing a coincidence, but I think that coincidence is just another way to say "God."

Birth control didn't affect me in the ways I had thought it might. It didn't make my husband treat me as an object, nor did it cause a miscarriage or a blood clot. It literally made me sick and tired. Who knows what four years of taking the pill will cost me in the long run? Will my fertility be cut short? Will I have trouble conceiving a child when I am ready? All I know is that my refusal to remove my personal crutch did affect me, and that the correct decision became apparent when I was ready and able to accept it. When I was single and juggling college, full time work, and wedding planning, God allowed my offense. But as soon as I was married, I was gently reminded of the costs.

Since I have been off birth control my life has changed considerably. I feel so much healthier. I laugh harder, louder, and longer. When I come home, I kiss my husband, and I can't wait to enjoy our peace and quiet together, whether we are cleaning the kitchen or watching a movie. And even though I now have to deal with a little bit of PMS, the happiness I share with my husband is well worth the occasional Midol.

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