

(2) Most women are experiencing serious side effects and many are permanently ceasing to use the pill.

(3) However, there is difficulty in finding another means of contraception which will meet the desire for safety, effectiveness and convenience of use.

(4) Although it is not evident in the figures given here we can tell from the letters and personal evaluations of experience with the pill written in answer to question 25 that women across the country are facing a dilemma which is causing extreme psychological stress—there is no contraceptive method available which is proven medically safe and effective. Women feel forced into choosing between taking higher risks of becoming pregnant or high risks of developing cancer, diabetes or other serious side effects. Finally women describe how little information support or understanding they receive from their doctors in trying to make these crucial life decisions.

Perhaps the best way to conclude this presentation is with a few representative quotes from our questionnaire:

2-27-70 "I cannot honestly say I have had unpleasant side effects from the pill but I have been to many doctors in the last four years in three cities in which we have lived, concerning headaches, and legaches. Each doctor and planned parenthood center assured me that the pill was not causing or contributing to my difficulties, and so I continued to take the pill. Incidentally, no one could give me an answer for the pain.

"The pain lately has been so severe I decided I would go off them just in case they could cause it. Since my doctors have argued for the pill I don't know or feel its my place to judge them, but I do feel every woman deserves to know the truth, and that will only come when we demand further testing in laboratories instead of the current situation which is that the woman is simply their guinea pig."

Mrs. W. Bloomington, Ind.

2-28-70 "I began using the 1mg. pill in June, 1969. Within a few weeks I began experiencing severe breast swelling and tenderness. After seeing my doctor as soon thereafter as an appointment was available (you really could die while you are waiting), I was assured that it was "nothing" and advised to continue on the pill, which I foolishly did for six months. (It's amazing how we believe and trust doctors and assume they know more than we do). During those months I saw him again about the pain and after an examination he concluded that it was due to wearing a bra that was too tight (you see now how buxom I had become). When I protested that I rarely wore a bra, that become the cause somehow. I was beginning to feel very neurotic.

"By the fall, I detected lumps in both breasts, at which point I freaked out and saw a doctor who referred me to a surgeon (more delays). My condition has been diagnosed by him as chronic cystic mastitis, often called "buckshot disease," caused by a hormone imbalance and not unusual in women experiencing menopause. I am 27. The surgeon felt this condition was a direct result of Norlestrin. This is my first month off the pill and there is a noticeable improvement in my condition, although there is no assurance that it will ever disappear entirely."

D. S. Washington, D.C.

2-70 "As indicated in question #21 I had many adverse side effects while taking the pill. The headaches I experience were attributed to "tension" as my male OB put it. Nausea is "normal" and something your system adjusts to with the pill. Weight gain too is just one of those things that go hand and hand with this form of birth control. The irritability and breathing difficulties were supposed to be due to tension and were treated with tranquilizers which only served to make me tired along with being irritable and depressed.

"When I complained of loss of libido, it was suggested that a psychiatrist would be the one to help me. (no doubt a male psychiatrist who supported Freud would have been recommended had I been fool enough to take the advice).

"I finally stopped taking the pill when the chest pains and leg cramps I experienced became excruciating and too frequent to bear. Never once during the 9 months that I was on this medication did the doctor ever suggest that I discontinue the pill or grant the possibility that the symptoms I manifested were pill induced."

Syracuse, New York