

the woman's body rejects the tiny baby and he or she dies. This is called a chemical abortion.

Medical research also shows that oral contraceptives cause excess production of progesterones. The build up of progesterones over time actually ages a woman's cervix. Hence there is a strong chance that a 30 year-old woman who has been on the Pill since the age of 18, has the cervix of a 45 year-old woman thus making it harder to achieve pregnancy. This effect may be reversed over time but the longer oral contraceptives are taken the longer it takes for a woman's body to reverse this effect.

Your local Natural Family Planning Promoter:



**For more information
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Sex, Marriage and Your Catholic Faith

Are they compatible?



Diocese of Pittsburgh

Absolutely.

Popular culture would have us believe that a couple's Catholic faith is separate from human sexuality and family planning concerns. However, quite the opposite is true.

This brochure seeks to answer some of the most frequently asked questions in the area of sexuality, medical science and faith.

1. What does the Catholic Church say about sex?

The Church teaches that sex is an expression of total love between a man and woman who have permanently committed to each other in the sacrament of marriage. This life-long commitment is dependent upon unconditional love, acceptance and total self-giving. To believe that sex is merely instinctive or simply pleasurable severely undervalues it.

Over the years, the Catholic Church has written extensively about sexuality and its role in life and marriage. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI recognized sex as rooted in God's love and plan for His people and their well-being. Paul VI saw sex as the dynamic element in every marriage, bringing permanence and enabling the couple to make wise, generous, and responsible decisions about the spacing of births and the size of their family.

The Church teaches that through sex, couples strengthen their marital relationship, and, in a special and profound way, participate in God's supreme act of creation. Sexuality, then, is not merely a matter of biology, nor is it simply a source of personal pleasure. It is an expression of total, self-giving love.

2. Why does the Catholic Church care about my sex life?

The Church wishes to safeguard your relation-

ship with your spouse and with God. Sex seals and renews a couple's marriage covenant before God and radically unites a man and a woman. By following God's norms for marriage, a husband and wife allow themselves to be open to receiving God's grace, thus strengthening their marriage bond and aiding each in their own path of holiness.

The Church also wishes to protect the good of society. Stronger marriages lead to stronger families. Stronger families lead to stronger societies.

Sexual rights and wrongs influence the health and happiness of individuals, families and neighborhoods. Consider how the misuse of sex over the past 40 years has dramatically increased the spread of diseases, contributed to the number of divorces and directly influenced the number of abortions.

3. Does the Catholic Church expect us to have as many children as we can physically procreate?

No. Parenthood is a privilege and a responsibility. How many children a husband and wife bring into the world is always a private decision that the couple makes prayerfully before God. When planning their family, married couples should consider important conditions such as their emotional, physical and psychological well being, financial means and other obligations. They should also consider their responsibilities toward God, each other and their extended family.

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4. How do we maintain the gift which sex is supposed to be and not conceive a child every month?

By practicing Natural Family Planning.

5. What is Natural Family Planning?

Natural Family Planning, or NFP, is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve or avoid pregnancy. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. To avoid pregnancy, couples using NFP simply abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the brief fertile phase of the woman's cycle.

NFP is highly effective and allows a couple to become aware of when the woman is most fertile. Couples who wish to achieve a pregnancy can take advantage of the fertile time of the cycle. Natural reproductive techniques have a higher success rate than in-vitro fertilization and *at a fraction of the cost!*

6. What is the difference between NFP and contraception?

Sex with contraception is the body saying, "I don't give all of myself to you" or "I don't love you unconditionally — you have to change part of yourself before we engage in sex." In both cases, the body is not speaking a truthful love but is speaking a lie. And the Catholic Church says no human

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deserves to be lied to in such an intimate moment of marital love.

Contraception deliberately blocks conception via barrier or chemical methods. Since NFP does not block or suppress conception it is not a contraceptive. Couples simply adjust their behavior to family planning intentions using naturally occurring signs in a woman's menstrual cycle.

With NFP no harmful, synthetic chemicals or devices enter into a woman's body as do with the Pill. With every drug there are potential side effects. Women taking the Pill often experience side effects such as irritability and weight gain.

Once it is learned, NFP is free. It is estimated that a woman using the Pill will pay around \$20 per month for her prescription. With NFP couples not only save approximately \$240 a year, but they save the hassle of trips to the pharmacy and the doctor's office for prescription refills.

7. Does NFP really work?

NFP is 99 percent effective when couples understand the methods and follow a method's guidelines. Modern NFP methods are not so-called "rhythm" methods which date back to the 1930s.

Natural Family Planning is completely reversible so it can be used to space children one month and achieve conception the very next month. This fact is something which artificial methods cannot claim.

8. Is NFP effective if I have irregular menstrual cycles?

Yes. Even though a woman may have irregular menstrual cycles, the signs that a woman's body displays when she is ovulating are the same for everyone. The woman becomes

keenly aware of these signs —whether they appear every month or not.

NFP can be used during breast feeding, during an illness, just before menopause and in other special circumstances. Once a woman understands this information, she and her husband can use it according to their family planning intentions.

NFP helps a woman become more aware of her body and her health in a way that might not have been possible before using it.

9. How does practicing NFP benefit my relationship with my spouse?

By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife. The key to successful use of NFP is cooperation and communication between husband and wife. Couples who use NFP soon learn that they have a shared responsibility for family planning. Husbands are encouraged to "tune in" to their wives' cycles. Both spouses are encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their sexual desires and their ideas on family size. In fact, NFP encourages couples to explore different ways to express their love to one another, thus improving intimacy and nurturing love.

"Many couples who leave unnatural methods of birth control find an improved marriage

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relationship with NFP. This has been confirmed by scientific social studies, and by informal surveys showing an extremely low divorce rate —under 5 percent— among couples practicing NFP. One survey showed that less than one percent of responding NFP users had been divorced and remarried" (*Nona Aquilar, No-Pill, No-Risk Birth Control [NY: Rawson Wade, 1980] 104-105*).

10. What if I have been prescribed the Pill for medical reasons?

Much research has been conducted in recent years in the area of female reproductive health. More natural and cooperative methods exist of treating illnesses that respect a female's fertility and menstrual cycle rather than shutting it down with the Pill. Consider asking your health care provider for other options. NaPro Technology, developed by the Pope Paul VI Institute, is becoming widely known and used. For information on this technology visit popepaulvi.com.

11. Can the Pill work as an abortifacient?

Yes. An abortifacient causes an early abortion, specifically the death of the zygote, embryo or fetus after conception has occurred. Abortion is an act of direct killing that takes the life of a tiny human being — a life that begins at fertilization.

The birth control pill can work in one of three ways: it can prevent ovulation (releasing an egg from the ovary); it can cause mucus in the cervix to change so that if sperm reach the cervix, they are not allowed to enter, and; it can irritate the lining of the uterus so that if the first two actions fail, and the woman does become pregnant, the tiny baby boy or girl will die before he or she can actually attach to the lining of the uterus. If the third action occurs,