

human reproductive hormones in tap water may be directly responsible for the 30 percent decrease in the sperm count among British males from 1989–2002 (Hall, 2004). It has also been theorized that the increased presence of human reproductive hormones in the water supply may be responsible for the earlier and earlier onset of menarche in young women.

It's good for all of us to understand and remember that using NFP isn't just good. It really is good for you. Now share this with others.

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A Natural Argument for NFP

Dr. Gregory Popcak

While a majority of people may be drawn to natural family planning out of religious conviction, many people throughout the world come to it for reasons that have nothing to do with religion. That shouldn't be a surprise. Why wouldn't people be interested in a safe, effective, low-cost, environmentally-friendly method of conceiving and avoiding pregnancy that also has health and relationship benefits?

Dissatisfied women

About 70 percent of women in their reproductive years use the Pill, but despite its popularity, many women, secular and otherwise, discover NFP after having had negative experiences with hormonal birth control. According to research published in 2010 in the *Journal of Family Practice* (Lowry, 2011), 57 percent of women are unhappy with the Pill due to side effects that include depression and other mood changes, nausea, decreased libido, or in rare instances, blood clots or stroke.

Failure rate is another complaint many couples cite for their dissatisfaction with the Pill. According to the FDA, with typical use the Pill has a failure rate of 8.7 percent (Guttmacher, 2010; Lowry, 2011), which is considerably higher than the rate of conception with NFP used by a married couple.

Depression & condoms

As crazy as it sounds, condom use may be linked to an increase in depression in women. Only about 1 to 5 percent of semen is comprised of sperm. The remaining 95 percent is comprised of 50 different compounds, many of which are mood enhancers — both anti-depressants and anti-anxiety agents — as well as chemicals that facilitate the physiological process of bonding that occurs in lovers' brains. These chemicals include, but are by no means limited to, cortisol (known to increase affection), estrone (which elevates mood), prolactin (a natural antidepressant), oxytocin (also elevates mood and facilitates bonding), thyrotropin-releasing hormone (another antidepressant), melatonin (a sleep-inducing agent) and even serotonin (perhaps the most well-known antidepressant neurotransmitter).

This is interesting, but research shows there is something to this. A 2010 *Scientific American* article summarized 10 years of research by evolutionary psychologists into the biochemical effects of semen in the vagina and found there is considerable evidence that women who have unprotected sex were less likely to become depressed than women whose partners used condoms. Additional research shows that if a woman does become depressed, she is significantly less likely to become suicidal if her partner does not use condoms.

The bottom line for NFP practitioners is that by avoiding condoms, not only are they decreasing the woman's risk of depression, they are increasing the likelihood that she

will be more stress-resistant than women whose partners use condoms.

Improved bonding

Research related to the psychobiological effect of semen in the vagina is a relatively new field of inquiry, but in my book, *Holy Sex!*, I summarize some of the research as it relates to marital stability and satisfaction. We now know that when the woman's body absorbs semen, not only does she get the benefit of the mood enhancers described above, a bonding process is stimulated in her brain. Every person (male and female) has structures in the brain that are responsible for promoting bonding, that sense of connectedness between one person and another. Chemicals in semen stimulate these bonding structures in the brain, causing lovers' brains to literally think of each other as an actual part of him or herself. For instance, if you and your partner break up, the same pain centers in the brain light up as if you broke your arm or some other body part.

When St. Paul told Christians that sex makes two people one flesh, he was not just speaking metaphysically. In a very real way, the chemicals shared between lovers during unprotected, vaginal intercourse cause the bonding structures in the lovers' brains to experience each other as one body.

Of course, sex is not the only activity that triggers the bonding reflex between lovers. Other forms of physical affection produce oxytocin, the so-called "love hormone," but sex appears to be an especially powerful catalyst for bonding that makes real changes in the lovers' brains and makes it harder for each to imagine being

without the other — on both a physiological and a conscious level.

Health awareness

A more well-known, nonreligious benefit of NFP is greater health awareness for the woman. By charting fertility signs, couples are more likely to catch any developing problems early, affording prompt and more effective medical intervention when necessary. I cannot tell you the number of stories I have collected over the years of NFP couples catching some problem so early that doctors were amazed but thrilled to have the opportunity to treat the disorder (whether a hormonal issue, infection, cancer, or other disease) with a much greater rate of success than they would have otherwise had. NFP is not just open to life. It saves lives.

Going green

Here is an inconvenient truth: hormonal contraceptives are destroying the environment. More than a half dozen studies in the United States and Europe have identified the chemicals in hormonal contraceptives as the cause of the increasing incidence of Intersex Disorder in fish swimming near water treatment plants. Intersex Disorder results when male fish start producing eggs.

The cause is the increased presence of human reproductive hormones in the rivers and lakes near water treatment facilities (water treatment cannot eliminate human reproductive hormones).

The problem does not end with fish. According to a study by the British Environmental Agency, the presence of