



**THURSDAY**

APRIL 26, 2007

**NEW MEDICINE**

# Pill gets mixed reviews

Birth control method eliminates periods

**By Stephanie Saul**  
New York Times News Service

For many women, a birth control pill that eliminates monthly menstruation might seem a welcome milestone.

But many view their periods as fundamental symbols of fertility and health, researchers have found. Rather than loathing their periods, women evidently carry on complex love-hate relationships with them.

This ambivalence is one reason that a decision expected next month by the Food and Drug Administration has engendered controversy. The agency is expected to approve the first contraceptive pill that is designed to eliminate periods as long as a woman takes it. Doctors say they know of no extra risk to the new regimen, but some women are uneasy about the idea.

"My concern is that the menstrual cycle is an outward sign of something that's going on hormonally in the body," said Christine L. Hitchcock, a researcher at the University of British Columbia. Hitchcock said she

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# Health & Fitness

**The Courier-Journal**

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# PILL | Stops periods

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worries about "the idea that you can turn your body on and off like a tap."

That viewpoint is apparently one reason some already available birth control pills that can enable women to have only four periods a year have not captured a larger share of the oral contraceptive market.

"It's not an easy decision for a woman to give up her monthly menses," said Ronny Gal, a drug industry analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein & Co.

But if the new pill, called Lybrel, is approved, Gal predicts an onslaught of advertising meant to persuade women to do just that. The drug's maker, Wyeth, said last Thursday that it was expecting FDA approval in May, but has declined to discuss its marketing plans.

The company's research shows that nearly two-thirds of women it surveyed expressed an interest in giving up their periods. For some women who view their periods as the natural order of things, the qualms go beyond medical concerns.

At the alternative Blue-Stockings Bookstore on the Lower East Side of Manhattan early this month, several dozen women gathered for the New York premiere of "Period: The End of Menstruation?" Giovanna Chesler's hour-long documentary explores the idea of suppressing the menstrual period but leaves the viewer to make up her own mind.

One who attended the screening, Aviva Bergman, a 22-year-old student at Mary-Goucher College in Maryland, said she would not use products that suppressed her period because it seemed unnatural. "I just feel that there's a reason you're getting it every month," she said.