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Pills are the Problem

by Mary LaPrade

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The pills are the problem.

"The Pill may cause permanent loss of sex drive," By Jeremy Laurance,
Health Editor 26 May 2005

The contraceptive pill, celebrated for liberating women's sexuality, may do the opposite, according to American researchers who have warned that women who take the Pill may experience a permanent decline in sexual desire.

Loss of libido is a well-known side-effect of oral contraceptives in some women and is listed in the leaflet on the contraceptive pill handed out by the Family Planning Association. But the research suggests the effect might be long-lasting or even permanent.

An estimated 3.5 million women take the contraceptive pill in the UK - about one in three of all women of reproductive age - and more than 100 million worldwide.

Oral contraceptives work by curbing the production of testosterone, which governs sex drive in both women and men, and by raising levels of a substance called sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG), which ties up testosterone and blocks its effects. Some women suffer side-effects, including dulled libido, muted or non-existent orgasms and painful intercourse.

Until now it has always been assumed that these are reversible, and cease to be a problem as soon as a woman comes off the Pill.

American researchers have now challenged this assumption. Irwin Goldstein and Claudia Panzer at the University of Boston, Massachusetts, studied 125 young women attending a sexual dysfunction clinic. Sixty-two were taking oral contraceptives, 40 had previously taken them, and 23 had never been on the Pill.

The scientists measured levels of SHBG in the women every three months for a year and found they were seven times higher in users of the Pill. Levels declined in women who had stopped taking the Pill, but remained three to four times higher than they were in those with no history of using oral

contraceptives. The findings were presented at a meeting of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists in Washington DC.

Dr Goldstein told New Scientist magazine: "There's the possibility it is imprinting a woman for the rest of her life."

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