

Study shows contraceptive pills can alter a woman's view of sexual attractiveness of her mate

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers working at Florida State University have found evidence that suggests that women's use of birth control pills can have an impact on how attractive she views her spouse, sexual satisfaction with a mate and how happy she is in her relationship. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, the

researchers describe two studies they conducted with female volunteers and what they found in doing so.

The two studies focused on finding an answer to the same basic question, what impact does taking [birth control](#) pills have on [intimate relationships](#)? The first study focused on a group of volunteers that included 48 [women](#) all of whom were in a relationship with a man—that study followed the women over four years, intermittently asking them to fill out questionnaires regarding their happiness in their relationship and with their mates. The second study had more participants (70) but lasted just one year.

In studying the combined data, the researchers found that on average, the women in the study who were on the pill while dating and then went off of it after getting married, reported a changed view of their mates. Those who were married to better than average looking men, reported higher satisfaction, while those with worse than average looking men reported lowered satisfaction with their mate. The men's looks were judged by an independent panel of volunteers. When asked about [sexual satisfaction](#), the women who changed their birth control reported less satisfaction regardless of attractiveness of their mate, while those that maintained taking the pill reported no change. They also found that women who were not on birth control before marriage, but then started on the pills afterwards, reported no difference in their satisfaction with their mates.

The findings suggest that being on the pill (because it changes hormone levels) causes women to be less influenced by [facial attractiveness](#), while conversely, getting off causes women to once again become more discerning. The team plans to conduct further experiments where they note different brands of the pill being used, as some have more or less hormones in them than others, to see if the results are weaker or stronger.

More information: The association between discontinuing hormonal contraceptives and wives' marital satisfaction depends on husbands' facial attractiveness , V. Michelle Russell, et al. *PNAS*, [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1414784111](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1414784111)

Abstract

How are hormonal contraceptives (HCs) related to marital well-being? Some work suggests HCs suppress biological processes associated with women's preferences for partner qualities reflective of genetic fitness, qualities that may be summarized by facial attractiveness. Given that realizing such interpersonal preferences positively predicts relationship satisfaction, any changes in women's preferences associated with changes in their HC use may interact with partner facial attractiveness to predict women's relationship satisfaction. We tested this possibility using two longitudinal studies of 118 newlywed couples. Trained observers objectively rated husbands' facial attractiveness in both studies. In study 1, wives reported their marital satisfaction every 6 mo for 4 y and then reported the history of their HC use for their relationship. In study 2, wives reported whether they were using HCs when they met their husbands and then their marital satisfaction and HC use every 4 mo for up to three waves. In both studies, and in an analysis that combined the data from both studies, wives who were using HCs when they formed their relationship with their husband were less satisfied with their marriage when they discontinued HCs if their husband had a relatively less attractive face, but more satisfied if their husband had a relatively more attractive face. Beginning HCs demonstrated no consistent associations with marital satisfaction. Incongruency between HC use at relationship formation and current HC use was negatively associated with sexual satisfaction, regardless of husbands' facial attractiveness. These findings suggest that HC use may have unintended implications for women's close relationships.

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