



Popping “the Pill”

Should you mix hormonal contraceptives with HIV?

December 1, 2008 By Laura Whitehorn

Hormonal birth control has a mixed reputation. Plus side: It’s easy to use and invisible during sex; it helps regulate menstrual cycles. Minus side: It doesn’t protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), may interact with some HIV meds and often confers unwanted side effects. Two recent announcements provide new insight:

According to an October paper in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, hormonal contraceptives are associated with increased risk of contracting HIV and chlamydia (another STI) and with faster HIV progression in women who do contract the virus. The researchers, who based their paper on a review of existing evidence, emphasize that this is preliminary and suggestive, not definitive, and that any negative impact of hormonal contraception on the rate of disease progression is likely counteracted by HIV combo therapy.

The FDA issued new guides for women taking oral contraceptives with the HIV protease inhibitor Reyataz (atazanavir). Those who take Reyataz without a Norvir (ritonavir) booster should not use an oral contraceptive containing more than 30 mcg of ethinyl estradiol. Women who take Norvir-boosted Reyataz should only use birth control pills that contain at least 35 mcg of ethinyl estradiol. (Further details are available at poz.com—[search “hormonal contraceptives.”](#))

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