

Male birth control pill improves

New studies indicate a higher success rate, but the pill is linked to some long-term side effects

By Kari Thorene
Higher Education Reporter

Researchers are making progress on the male birth control pill, but they still have a ways to go.

The pill, which is currently in development, contains two male hormones and is intended to shut down sperm production. Two new studies have shown a decrease in some of the pill's side effects — such as acne and lowered libido — and an increase in the success rate of the pill by about two-thirds.

However, Dr. William Disher of the Student Health Center is skeptical. "They've been working on things for a long time and haven't had much success," he said. "There's an awful lot of obstacles."

The nature of the male body makes a contraceptive pill difficult, Disher said. "Sperm production is an ongoing process — it isn't quickly and easily reversible."

Therefore, contraceptive pills will take longer to take effect, Disher said.

Additionally, testosterone is "significantly" linked to prostate cancer, Disher said. One of the obstacles researchers for the male birth control pill have faced is ensuring that altering types and lev-

Male birth control

■ **WHAT:** A pill that shuts down sperm production; the pill is still in development stages

■ **HOW:** With the use of two male hormones, cyproterone acetate and testosterone undecanoate

■ **SIDE EFFECTS:** Prostate cancer, acne, weight gain and decreased libido

Recent study results (using different hormone dosages):

■ **1997:** Zero sperm count in 1 out of 8 participants; low sperm counts in 62.8 percent of participants

■ **1996:** "Safe" sperm count in 7 out of 9 participants

enough to be safe.

The pills in both tests contained two hormones: cyproterone acetate and testosterone undecanoate. Both substances work to decrease sperm production. The studies used varying percentages of the hormones.

During the 1996 study, nine men were given low oral doses of the two hormones. "By the twelfth week of treatment, seven of the men had no detectable sperm in their seminal fluid," according to the Medical Tribune News Service.

Older studies gave men 100 milligrams of testosterone coupled with between 50 and 100 milligrams of cyproterone a day.

While they achieved zero-sperm counts, the treatment could lead to decreased libido and other long-term side effects, the Medical Tribune News Service reported.

In the 1996 study, led by Dr. Cristina Meriggiola of the University of Bologna, the researchers decreased the dosage of cyproterone to 25 or 13 milligrams per day. With this treatment, testosterone levels didn't change.

Daily testosterone injections can shut down sperm production, but they have negative side effects, such as acne and weight gain, according to an article in *The Oregonian*. Scientists have begun looking for combinations of synthetic hormones to alleviate some of the side effects.

els of testosterone won't lead to such long-term problems.

The two most recent studies on the subject both were produced in Bologna, Italy. The most recent was published in the November issue of *Fertility and Sterility*, and the other was published in 1996.

The studies show progress toward eliminating long-term side effects, but they haven't shown great contraceptive success. The results of the November study show a zero-sperm count in only one out of eight men and decreased sperm counts low enough to be potentially successful in 62.8 percent. In the 1996 study, 78 percent of participants reached a sperm count low

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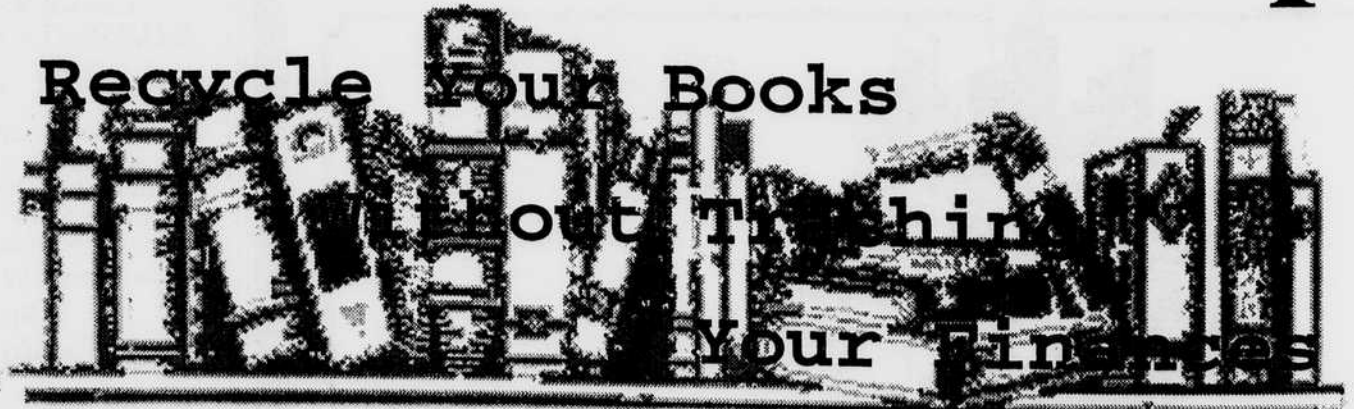
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