

# Get the Facts: Health Benefits of Using Contraception to Plan, Avoid or Space Pregnancy

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**Affordable, accessible birth control helps women plan their pregnancies and have healthier pregnancies and healthier babies.**

Birth control is an integral component of primary and preventive health care for most women and is vitally important to the health of both mothers and babies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention included family planning in its list of the “Ten Great Public Health Achievements in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>1</sup> The ability to time and space pregnancies reduces fetal, infant and maternal mortality and morbidity<sup>2</sup> and for most, planning healthy pregnancies is impossible without contraception.

## Birth Control Prevents Unintended Pregnancy<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ The unintended pregnancy rate in the United States is nearly 50 percent.
- ▶ Among low-income women, the rates are even higher and are increasing.
- ▶ Poor women are five times more likely to experience an unintended pregnancy than affluent women.
- ▶ About 43 percent of unintended pregnancies end in abortion.

## Birth Spacing is Good for Babies

For **each month** less than 18 months between pregnancies, the likelihood of: having a **low birth weight baby** increases by 3.25 percent and having a **premature baby** increases by nearly 2 percent.<sup>4</sup>

### Unintended pregnancy has negative health implications for babies:

- ▶ Women who choose to carry an unintended pregnancy to term are less likely to get early and regular prenatal care and less likely to stop unhealthy behaviors such as smoking or drinking alcohol.<sup>5</sup> **Women whose pregnancies are planned are almost 10 percent less likely to use tobacco** in the three months before they became pregnant.<sup>6</sup>

- ▶ A woman whose pregnancy is unplanned has almost **twice the likelihood of giving birth prematurely.**<sup>7</sup>
  - ▶ 80 percent of infants born before 27 weeks develop respiratory distress syndrome. Respiratory distress syndrome is sometimes followed by bronchopulmonary dysplasia, which can lead to growth, health and neurological problems during childhood.
  - ▶ Preterm infants are also at greater risk of gastrointestinal and cardiovascular ailments.
  - ▶ Preterm babies have undeveloped immune systems and have a more difficult time fighting off disease.<sup>8</sup>

**Women whose pregnancies are unintended are less likely to breastfeed.<sup>9</sup> Breastfeeding has numerous benefits mothers and children in developed nations.<sup>10</sup>**

Some of the benefits for children include a reduced likelihood of:

- ▶ severe lower respiratory tract infections,
- ▶ asthma,
- ▶ obesity,
- ▶ type 1 and 2 diabetes,
- ▶ childhood leukemia, and
- ▶ sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).<sup>11</sup>

Benefits for mothers include reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, breast and ovarian cancer, and postpartum depression.<sup>12</sup>

## Unintended Pregnancies Have a Negative Impact on Women’s Health

- ▶ 20.8 percent of women whose pregnancies were unplanned experienced postpartum depression, compared to 15.7 percent of women generally.<sup>13</sup>
- ▶ Pregnancy has elevated risks for women with certain chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes and obesity.
- ▶ For women with serious medical conditions, such as pulmonary hypertension, cyanotic heart disease, or the Marfan Syndrome, pregnancy may pose a significant health risk.<sup>14</sup>

## Cost is a Significant Deterrent to Accessing Contraception

- ▶ Even minimal co-pays for preventive services deter consumers from obtaining the care they need.<sup>15</sup>

- ▶ An estimated 17.4 million women need subsidized services and supplies because they are unable to access or purchase contraceptive services and supplies on their own.<sup>16</sup>
- ▶ Women of reproductive age typically spend 68 percent more out-of-pocket on health care than men, partly because of contraceptive costs.<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ Of the 43 million women at risk of unintended pregnancy between 2006 and 2008, 11 percent were not using contraception. For young women, the numbers were even greater with 19 percent of 15-19 year olds and 14 percent of women aged 20-24 not using contraception.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ More than half of young adult women say cost concerns have led them to not use their birth control method as directed.<sup>19</sup>
- ▶ The upfront costs of some methods, such as long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), make them inaccessible to many women today, yet LARCs are even more cost effective than other methods in the long-term and are nearly 100 percent effective.<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ Family planning clinics are only able to meet about 40 percent of the unmet demand for contraception<sup>21</sup> and face challenges in continuing at this level in the present environment.
- ▶ But every dollar invested in family planning programs saves the government almost four dollars down the line in pregnancy-related Medicaid costs.<sup>22</sup> A recent study indicates that, by taking into account the long-term costs not only of reducing unintended pregnancy rates but of the number of children born into poverty, each dollar invested in family planning can save almost six dollars down the line.<sup>23</sup>

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