

Women speak out on the dangers of the Pill

figured it out -- they were on Triphasil. I went to (UVIC) Health Services and that's what they put me on. Now I just get headaches sometimes.

I talked to a doctor about going off it. He said if nothing major is wrong, I shouldn't.

I don't think I ever learned how to take them right. Once I forgot my pills when I went away for six days. I came back and took six at once. I got really sick.

CLAIRE: I went on the Pill when I was thirteen. I was a diver so I had really irregular periods. I had the worst cramps in the world, that's why they put me on it.

I had evil mood swings. I'd laugh, cry, get angry, all for no reason; I got rashes. I had wild dreams too, the first year on the Pill.

No worse than any other girl as far as that goes.

At that age, I just thought it was me having growing pains. I know now it all had to do with the Pill, being older and looking back.

When I was 15, I remember thinking I was dying, bleeding and bleeding for several days. I went to the doctor, he said my body was just getting used to the new kind of Pill he put me on.

Three or four years ago, I started getting these funny sensations. I'd feel numb from my pelvis to my abdomen when I was having my period.

I went to the hospital; they told me I was having hardening of the arteries.

The doctor at the U of A hospital asked me what medication I was on. I said none, just the Pill.

I'd been on it so long, it was sterilizing me, the doctor said. They took me off to see what would happen, if my body would heal itself. No such luck.

They took some scrapings and found out the Pill was making my uterus tight and my fallopian tubes swell, that's what stops you from getting pregnant. For me, it's permanent.

What it's done is take away my chance to have kids. It was because of the Pill (strength) that the amount of time I was on it.

The doctor wasn't that surprised about it. He said my family doctor should have told me I wasn't active I could go off it. When I finally

went off the Pill, it was like my body going through withdrawal. The change in hormone levels was so great, I couldn't handle it. It's like going off an anti-depressant.

It's addiction.

Recently, I went to this birth control clinic and said I wanted to be fitted for a diaphragm. They asked me again -- I said I'm 24 and I know what I want.

These doctors and registered nurses are just glorified drug-pushers. It's like Halloween candy, they just give it out. They tell you if you don't want a child take it.

I think doctors should tell you what can happen before they put you on the Pill.

When doctors give out the information booklets, they don't think, "Maybe this kid can't read or doesn't want to read."

Birth control education is still just, "You take the Pill if you don't want to get pregnant, you use condoms if you don't want STD's."

I've been off it for three years, and I feel really great. I'd rather have a hysterectomy than be put back on the Pill.

LUCILLE: I went on the Pill at 17 because I didn't want to get pregnant. That was before AIDS was really well known, in 1986.

I went to this doctor because my friend told me she gave out free samples. She asked me questions about my sex life and that was it. No warnings.

I was on Triphasil for six years. Every once in a while I would get these terrible rages. I had problems dealing with anger. I'd throw things and break them and quiver all over.

It was years until I connected it up -- I was only a teenager then.

I told my doctor I was worried about mood swings, she acted like I was irrational. But I said I was concerned and wanted to go off Triphasil. She gave me the impression there was no connection, but she gave me help trying to find another kind.

Now I'm on Ortho 5/35 and I don't have those rages.

But I don't get a period anymore. I asked my doctor about that -- she said it often happens.

LISA: I was 16, and I was thinking about sleeping with my boyfriend. He really wasn't into condoms, and STD's weren't a big thing then.

I was a virgin, so was he. The Pill seemed the most reliable form of birth control. First I asked my mom. In her opinion, it was the best idea. Then I went to my family doctor. Everyone agreed it was the best way.

That's when I had my first Pap smear. I think the doctor warned me about some STD's and breast cancer. He gave me the simple packs of Ortho 777 right away. I only took them for three months, then I broke up with my boyfriend. The first month the problems were the most severe. I felt sick some mornings -- I also had headaches and mood swings, which I wasn't expecting at all. I started to gain weight and my breast size increased. My next serious relationship, I was almost 20. I'd heard a lot more about AIDS, so I was more worried. I considered using other methods. But I went to this doctor, and he was against using condoms.

I wanted a method of birth control that was more shared, without repercussions on my entire body. I went to see this woman doctor at the University of Ottawa Health Services. She said I should use condoms -- women relying on the Pill were deluding themselves. Foam and condoms are just as effective. And there are a lot of women on the Pill walking around with STD's. She thought condoms were a prerequisite to having sex in the 1990s.

But this year, I started bleeding really heavily and the doctor prescribed the Pill. I was anaemic, they had to slow down my bleeding. I told them my concerns about hormonal changes -- but something had to be done and they really thought the Pill would work.

I haven't taken them yet, they're sitting in a drawer at home. No one ever talked about me taking the Pill for a short term: they suggested this was the way my mature body was supposed to be. But the flow seems to have reduced itself over the last few months.

Doctors still don't understand the long term effects of taking the Pill. ●