

CHAPTER XIV
BIRTH CONTROL IN PRACTICE

Canada

DEAR MRS SANGER

My wife with our two little daughters live in ——, while I have been separated from them a year having started for —— last February I cannot help but feel that the separation would never have occurred had I known 10 years ago what I know now about sex matters Of the hundreds of dollars paid to doctors for my wife's illness it is now my conviction that fully 98% would have been unnecessary had we the proper knowledge of our bodies and contraceptives to say nothing of the suffering and misunderstandings resulting from our lack of this knowledge We are now considering a reconciliation as there has been no divorce no poverty and no public knowledge of our trial divorce We have simply been living 2400 miles apart for a year

There is no disease in our family as both of us have always been chaste We are of equal age and education and mental capacity Sex ignorance seems to have been the rock on which our matrimonial ship grounded Perhaps you can help to float the good ship again But the best interests of our 2 girls of course demand that we live together I think we can do this in harmony if we can secure reliable and complete contraceptive information I know enough about my own body to live in good health and physical condition under any ordinary circumstances It is in behalf of my wife that I am now writing to you I am willing to assume any risk to enable her to get this information whether it be from America Holland or Australia as I am certain that all women are entitled to it

D H K.

CHAPTER XIV

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WE have seen from our last chapter that from the point of view of all concerned—husband wife and child—the control of the generative function especially during the earlier years of marriage—recommends itself to intelligent and prudent couples who have their own well being and that of their future families at heart Birth control is a scientific practice which permits young husbands and wives to guide and direct their own destinies and to build up their health happiness and economic strength

Unfortunately the laws of the United States have not yet been amended to allow me to write as fully upon this subject as I should like to nor do they permit me to state the method or methods I consider safest wisest and most harmless

Nevertheless I shall try to warn against uncertain and often dangerous methods advocated and practiced in this country today

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which do not fulfil requirements and which should for various reasons be discontinued From my experience and knowledge of women who apply to me for help I wish to emphasize the absolute necessity for each wife and mother desirous of obtaining safe and hygienic knowledge of birth control to apply to her regular physician Information picked up from neighbors or intimate women friends no matter how helpful their intentions may be is not to be relied upon What advice may be helpful for one may be useless for another

Let us also acknowledge at the outset that the science of Birth Control has until the present day not been correlated with the practice of medicine Consequently this science has not been standardized While the majority of educated and intelligent classes in every civilized country of the world have practised birth control in one form or another during the present century and many of them for the past one hundred years there are no scientific records or data concerning this practice or of the success or failure of any particular method of birth control

The practical phase of birth control has been advanced for the most part on theory or by

word of mouth by very limited personal experience rather than by the collection and testing of data from wider sources Acknowledging this fact we must realize the importance of proceeding slowly in the advocacy of any particular or general methods of contraception

However on the basis of our admittedly limited studies certain facts nevertheless stand out clearly

1 There is no one method of contraception that is suitable to be used by all men or women

2 A method which may be of the utmost satisfaction in one case may be an utter and absolute failure in another

3 One woman should not recommend to another any special method of prevention Each woman is individual and needs special advice by a physician

4 A physical examination is the best preliminary step toward ascertaining the suitable method of birth control in each individual case

5 The use and direction of the method should be determined by the wife rather than the husband This is necessary to safeguard the health of both

6 The two methods generally used by men

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are known to be unsatisfactory to many men and to their wives likewise

7 A douche whether of cold water or an antiseptic solution cannot be relied upon as a contraceptive It is only a cleansing agent and should in no sense be relied upon for the prevention of conception

8 The superstition that during the period of nursing a baby the mother is safe from conceiving another is not true in fact

9 The safe period recommended by the Roman Catholic Church and by certain physicians as a period in the month during which the wife does not conceive is not to be relied upon

10 The interuterine instruments are strongly condemned by the most experienced members of the medical profession and by the Clinical Research Department of the American Birth Control League

11 The safest and most hygienic methods known today cannot be used by the unmarried girl

These are the facts directly and simply told They may be of little use to the mother already distracted and worried from too frequent pregnancy and childbearing She may throw aside

this book exclaiming ' I know all these things already! Why doesn't she tell me of some thing I can use something that will help me out of my predicament?'

Such a woman should know that even were I to tell here what are known to be successful and reliable methods of contraception it would be unsafe for women to act upon that advice without first consulting her physician midwife or obstetrical nurse For each woman must ascertain what is best suitable to her own physical needs and physiological structure

It should never be forgotten that every woman differs in her physiological and bodily make up The bride to be cannot be given the same advice as the mother of a small family The mother of nine or ten children presents a case entirely different from the woman who has given birth to but one or two

Similarly the mother who has always had sound medical attention and care before during and after the birth of her babies presents an entirely different problem from that of the unfortunate woman whose womb is torn and lacerated

Furthermore the woman who can afford the luxury of remaining in the hospital for ten

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days, or even two or three weeks after the birth of her infant is it goes without saying not to be given the same advice as the poor mother who has arisen the same day to perform household duties, or has had to return almost immediately to factory or shop to earn bread for the hungry mouths of her ever increasing family

In short to secure reliable advice concerning her individual condition each woman should undergo a physical examination by a physician in whom she has fullest confidence If your family physician refuses this advice do not on this account give up Try again and again until you find a physician who understands your case and can advise you according to your individual needs

Advice given in books or pamphlets reliable as it may be for the majority of women cannot be relied upon as a certainty that can be practiced by all It may give results safe and sure 100 per cent perfect for one hundred women and yet the methods advocated may fail—*you* Why? Because your womb may be tipped forward or backward Or it may hang too low in the vaginal canal Or it may be very high in the vaginal canal and out of reach of the means of protection advised There are many

reasons why the method best suited to certain women may be unsuited and unfit for others

Successfully to prevent conception means eternal vigilance. You cannot afford to overlook the necessary precaution even once. One mistake or laxness in a year may result in a possible pregnancy each year. Yet the precautions which may seem irksome at first soon become a matter of course and hygiene. Be constantly careful and prepare for each act of intercourse as accurately as a surgeon would prepare for an operation. The surgeon knows that the slightest carelessness may render his work valueless and may cost the life or future health of the patient he is operating upon.

To prevent pregnancy hygienic and careful preliminary precautions must also be taken.

Some women who find themselves pregnant are too ready to blame the method advised when as a matter of fact they have been careless in applying it or temporarily negligent. In almost every case in which the woman is truthful she admits that perhaps just once as she expresses it she has neglected to follow directions. One such negligence a year is sufficient to give the normal woman a family of ten or twelve children during a lifetime.

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While the discontinuance of certain methods is often advised and better ones chosen in their stead, all such advice should be given with the utmost caution and followed only after the most careful consideration

One general rule stands out above all others. If you have found a method of birth control which is successful and produces no ill effects upon your health or that of your husband do not change your method. Keep it until you find some adequate reason to change.

Another fact that every woman should remember. The methods advised for birth control are not methods of abortion. When a woman goes to a doctor or a druggist and asks how to bring herself around or how to bring about the delayed menstrual period she is actually asking for something that will bring about an abortion. Often it is innocently assumed that no harm is done if the delay of the monthly period is only one of a few weeks.

I wish to save women the injury done to their health by stating here that drugs and medicines are almost always injurious and moreover usually fail to produce the results desired. Keep away from drugs! Prevention is the solution of this problem. It is far better

for married people married women especially to protect themselves from ill timed and undesired pregnancy than to indulge in questionable methods of abortion

One of the most disastrous consequences of a lack of scientific knowledge of birth control is that method used by a certain class of women which consists in keeping away from the husband By this I mean a constant denial of sex communion inspired by the overwhelming fear of pregnancy This practice usually brings about the most disastrous consequences For its evils do not consist merely in the denial of physical intercourse The poor distracted worried and hounded wife dares not permit her husband even the ordinary affectionate expression his heart longs for and which his whole body and soul desires and needs The wife harried and panic stricken, dares not even give him a welcoming smile she shudders at his touch She struggles against her deepest impulses and meets his tender embrace with a frigid resistance She dreads the homecoming of her husband for his presence means not peace but eternal conflict in her heart I know of one such case in which both husband and wife agreed to such a policy of married absti

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nence Unable to bear the situation the husband in desperation went away to war and was killed in the trenches In the case of an other young couple who lived in the utmost intimacy yet because of their uncertain financial condition did not desire children the husband was finally driven to accept a post overseas After his departure the young wife sank into a condition verging on insanity and had to be sent to a private sanitarium

There is only one period in the month when these unhappy women have any peace That is during the menstrual period during which the wife is protected by custom and tradition against the sexual advances of her husband

If the husband understands and sympathizes with the emotional and nervous strain his loved one is undergoing he will straightway make it his duty to obtain safe and reliable birth control information and do everything in his power to protect her from this unwholesome fear and worry It is his duty in any case to find the physician who can diagnose and advise suitable methods

If however the husband is lacking in understanding and is thoughtful only of his own urgent needs he may meet her resistance by

unkind comment even by brutal retorts and insinuations. He may threaten her by infidelity and even look elsewhere for a woman to satisfy his passion. It often happens that such men unintentionally fall victims to professional or occasional prostitutes.

Women should not fail to recognize that the sex urge is strong in the male. Sometimes it is as strong from the biological point of view as the hunger for food. In some men it cannot be controlled by the usual code of morals or the religious and ethical teaching instilled by early training and tradition. Consciously or unconsciously everything is brushed aside by such men in their overwhelming expression of passion. Such men are the slaves of desire instead of its master. Yet such men exist and they are too numerous to count. When their sex urge is not thwarted this savagery in their natures does not reveal itself. The same man may be considered the best of citizens and of parents as indeed he may in truth be in most respects but let anything stand in the way of his sexual demands and an entirely unexpected set of characteristics will suddenly be revealed and take possession of him.

Our aim here is not to criticize human nature

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but to understand it. Such men reveal a characteristic common to all of us but under greater control and direction. It is necessary for women to recognize these latent primitive instincts and to recognize their powers even in the best of husbands.

It may not be that the disappointed man will deliberately seek out another woman. But when the sex instinct is stimulated without being satisfied he is rendered infinitely more susceptible to the attractions of other women. The consequence of such temptations are almost inevitable.

The farseeing wife must be doubly tender to such a husband, proud of the deep primitive energies that are hidden in his nature. Passion is a thing to be proud of. Her problem is to dominate and perhaps sublimate these deep savage instincts which permeate his being instead of seeking to thwart and deny them. The woman who is wise will seek to find means whereby she can lift his love to the plane of her own where soul communion is desired. His wild passions will thus be directed toward real love and converted into a dynamic instead of destructive creation of happiness in marriage.