

Contraceptive methods shape women's sexual pleasure and satisfaction

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New data from The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University demonstrate that many women think condoms undermine sexual pleasure, but those who use both hormonal contraception and condoms report higher overall sexual satisfaction.

The study authors suggest that this inconsistency reflects how women think about their contraceptive method when asked questions about two different aspects of sexuality -- sexual enjoyment and overall sexual satisfaction.

When considering overall sexual satisfaction, which goes beyond the immediate sexual moment and includes factors such as sexual self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, women who used both condoms and hormonal methods reported the highest levels of sexual satisfaction.

On the other hand, when asked directly about the effect of contraceptive methods on sexual enjoyment, women who used condoms, either alone or with hormonal methods, were far more likely to report decreased pleasure, suggesting women feel condoms make sex less pleasurable. Those who used only hormonal methods, such as the birth control pill, were unlikely to associate their method with decreased sexual pleasure.

The study, published in November's issue of *Sexual Health*, begins to answer questions about contraceptive methods and women's sexuality -- an area largely ignored by researchers.

"The public health community has paid little attention to women's sexual experiences with contraceptive methods, especially condoms," said Stephaine Sanders, associate director of The Kinsey Institute and a co-author of the study. "If women think condoms detract from sexual pleasure, they may be less inclined to use them consistently."

Findings include:

- Only 4 percent of women who relied on hormonal methods of contraception reported decreased pleasure, but hormonal users reported the lowest overall sexual satisfaction scores.
- While 23 percent of women who used both condoms and hormonal methods reported decreased pleasure, they had the highest sexual satisfaction scores.
- Women who used condoms alone or along with a hormonal method were six to seven times more likely to report decreased sexual enjoyment compared to those who used hormonal methods only.
- Women with no history of a sexually transmitted infection were more than twice as likely to report that their method decreased sexual pleasure.

Source: Indiana University

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