

Researchers eye newer, safer birth control method

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Oregon Health & Science University researchers have uncovered a new contraceptive that is more focused, safer and, therefore, available for use among a larger population of women. The research took place at OHSU's Oregon National Primate Research Center. It is published online in the journal *Endocrinology*.

Today's [birth control](#) methods are several decades old. The Food and Drug Administration for example, approved "The pill," in 1961. It prevents contraception by boosting hormone levels through the use of synthetic hormones. These higher hormone levels interrupt the normal menstrual cycle. In short, the synthetic hormones inhibit the release of the hormones responsible for triggering ovulation.

"While the method works, it has its downsides," explains ONPRC scientist Jon Hennebold, Ph.D. "The biggest concern is that by boosting hormone levels, this contraceptive method affects systems throughout a woman's body. Therefore, there are some risks associated with current contraceptive methods, primarily cardiovascular disease."

An additional downside is that hormonal treatments like the pill require the user to conform to a daily medication schedule. Because of this requirement, the pill is only about 80 to 90 percent effective.

In comparison, the contraceptive OHSU researchers are developing is not hormonal and more focused on mechanisms that directly result in the release of an egg. This new approach targets the key enzymes

responsible for the release of an egg. Hennebold and his colleagues were able to determine exactly which enzymes to focus on by studying rhesus macaque monkeys that have a very similar reproductive system to humans.

This research in monkeys has demonstrated that targeting these enzymes can prevent the release of an egg from the ovary. The next step for Hennebold and colleagues is to determine the delivery method of such a drug and the timetable for medication.

"Our hope is that the next generation of birth control is more targeted and has a higher effectiveness level," added Hennebold. "Much more work is necessary to further our proposed solution, but we believe that better, safer contraceptive methods are possible."

Provided by Oregon Health & Science University

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