

Mobile health app simplifies process of choosing birth control method

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A new, free iPad application developed at UCLA helps women navigate through the sometimes confusing process of selecting a birth control method without sacrificing quality of information. The app is appealing to look at, easy to use, and highlights the most effective types of birth control, while also revealing any potential side effects, risks and warning signs.

The [app](#), which is called Plan A [Birth Control](#) or Plan ABC, is designed to help a woman prepare for her visit with a contraception counselor or an ob-gyn. Having reviewed the app, when the patient meets with her health practitioner, she has already read the basic and medically accurate information on birth control, said Dr. Aparna Sridhar, a clinical fellow in family planning in the UCLA Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology who developed the program.

Such preparation could save doctors time during appointments and result in better informed patients. Sridhar envisions the app being accessible through kiosks in clinic [waiting rooms](#) while a patient is waiting to be seen by her physician.

"Women using this app will already have baseline knowledge about what they're looking for when they see their doctor," said Sridhar, who is completing her master's degree in public health. "That way doctors may need less time to explain the basic introductions to all of the different birth control methods, and can spend more time focused on a more narrow discussion tailored to the individual patient and her particular

needs."

Available in iTunes, the app lists the top 10 forms of reversible birth control, from the most effective at the top to the least effective at the bottom, ranging from the IUD to hormonal treatments to the [female condom](#). One of Sridhar's goals in creating the app was to ensure that women could access the most current, medically accurate information using modern technology. Much of the information available through the internet, Sridhar said, is unreliable and not based in the latest research. You can download the app [here](#).

Once a user selects a type of birth control from the app, questions appear that help the woman decide if that method is right for her. For example, the birth control pill section cautions smokers and women over 35 that they should consider a different type of contraception, because this population is at an increased their risk of complications while using the standard birth control pill.

"The app tells a woman everything she needs to know about the form of birth control she chooses – what it is, including a photo, how it works, how to use it, how it's inserted, the efficacy and any side effects or [warning signs](#) that something may be wrong," Sridhar said.

Sridhar developed the app in about three months as part of her fellowship research project. The cost of app development was funded in part by a grant from the Society for Family Planning. Sridhar is currently conducting a study to measure differences in [contraception](#) choice and the knowledge of women who use the birth control.

"If the study finds that the app is as effective as seeing a birth control counselor or physician, then we can make it available in waiting rooms and save both time and money by using our human resources to handle issues that a piece of software can't," she said.

Angela Chen, an associate clinical professor of [obstetrics and gynecology](#) at UCLA and chief of [family planning](#) services, said the app helps women to actively engage in their own health decisions.

"We anticipate that this will translate into better understanding of birth control options and stricter adherence to health commitments. Witnessing the app being used by our patients over the past several months, I already see the benefit in terms of time saved by the clinicians," Chen said. "Having used the app at the beginning of the office visit, the patient has established a basic understanding of contraceptive methods by the time she encounters the physician. That makes our job much easier. The patients seemed to enjoy navigating the app and engaging in a multi-dimensional learning experience about birth control."

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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