



NFP Realities

Enriching God's Family Day by Day

Summer 2009

In This Issue

What Have You Done For Your Marriage Today?

Family Arguments Have Real, Lasting Impact on Adolescent Mental Health

Breastfeeding May Reduce the Risk of SIDS

Oral Contraceptive Use Continues to be Linked to Breast Cancer

Combined Oral Contraceptive Use Linked to Risk for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

DMPA Causes Significant Weight Gain, Changes in Body Mass

Marked Decline in Breast Cancer Risk After Stopping EPT

Soy Protein Not Effective in Preventing Postmenopausal Bone Loss

Calcium Intake May Protect Against Cancer

Perfluorinated Chemicals May Curb Fertility

Ovulation Induction Associated With Increased Cancer Risk

Dear NFP family,

With the initiative of the country's bishops focusing on marriage and family life, there are a lot of great opportunities available to us to promote the use of Natural Family Planning. You can read more about this initiative in the first article of this issue of NFP Realities.

Those of us who attended the NACFLM conference in June heard a lot about promoting NFP. It is obvious that NFP is becoming a greater priority to the U.S. bishops. Conference topics included using online education for teaching NFP, using online social media to promote its use, integrating NFP into marriage preparation programs, finding new and creative ways to market NFP to specific audiences, and how the various NFP methods can work together. In light of these discussions, we would like to share with you some of the initiatives that our own diocesan program has been working on.

- We have just launched a portal for Northwest Family Services' new online NFP education program. Clients will now have three options for learning the Northwest Model. On our website you will notice that a new navigation link (NFP Class Registration) has taken the place of the link for Class Schedules. Check it out! They can take the classes face-to-face, by paper correspondence or online. We will have an inservice to orient you all to the online education system.
- The *Teaching the Way of Love* program continues to be very successful and to develop. We are in the middle of creating a home study course for the series that will supplement the presentations or that could also be used as a stand-alone program. Our next step will be to develop a DVD series of the program. Future plans include a podcast series and more online resources. For those of you who are less aware of the *Teaching the Way of Love* program, it is a

Our Presence on the Web

Diocese of La Crosse

Office of Family Life

Office of Natural Family Planning

The Parent's Place

Websites Referenced in the Article

For Your Marriage

<http://www.fromyourmarriage.org/>

Simmons College School of Social Work

www.simmons.edu

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three-presentation series that serves as “remote preparation” or “pre-evangelization” for NFP and chastity. Its focus is to empower parents to be the primary educators of their children and to take the lead in teaching their children about virtue in general and specifically about chastity before marriage and within marriage.

- Plans are unfolding for the next stage of development for the *Parent's Place* website. We will be adding new tabs to offer more specific help to single parents and to more specifically support the *Teaching the Way of Love* program.

And the best news is that all of this activity will only mean more work for our NFP instructors in the form of getting more clients!

In addition to reading about the bishops initiative on marriage and family, check out the article on the effects of parental conflict on adolescents. This study underscores the importance of creating healthy marriages and in empowering parents to become forces for goodness in their children's lives.

Like all issues of NFP Realities, this one has a lot of information on health. While the moral reasons for avoiding contraception are sufficient for most of us, the physical harm caused by such mechanical manipulation of our bodies continues to add to the proof that it is not God's design for us. In contrast, science continues to discover more and more benefits of breastfeeding. This issue of NFP Realities also has a couple of important studies for women in the pre-menopause phase of their lives.

Please do take the time to read through these studies. The more we know about the science behind what we practice, the better equipped we will be to promote the use of NFP in our culture.

My the Peace of Christ reign in your hearts,
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What Have You Done For Your Marriage Today?



For the past two years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been developing the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage. This initiative has included radio and television spots, billboards, social networking venues (Facebook) and an extensive website.

This website is quickly becoming a major resource for couples looking to get married, and for those looking to make their marriage great.

Here is a short list of the most recent resources added to the website:

- 23 frequently asked questions about marriage in the Catholic Church
- How the financial turndown has affected marriages in America
- A complete wedding guide that includes all of the possible choices for readings, commentary on each reading, tips for choosing music, and options for personalizing the wedding.
- An RSS feed through which you can receive daily marriage tips and blogs.

In the near future, the initiative will develop a Spanish-language website to offer relevant resources to married couples in the Hispanic community as well.

If you haven't discovered the For Your Marriage website yet, we strongly recommend checking it out! You can find it at www.foryourmarriage.org.

Family Arguments Have Real, Lasting Impact on Adolescent Mental Health

Science continues to verify for us that parents are the primary influences in their children's lives, more powerful even than peers. A massive longitudinal study tracked the mental health development of nearly 400 people from kindergarten to their mid-30's to try to determine what environmental factors lead to mental illness.

Unsurprisingly, children who experienced physical violence in the family by age 18 were more likely to have a mental disorder. However, this study also strikingly revealed that children who reported an increase in verbal conflict (family arguments) at the age of 15 were more likely to suffer from major depression, alcohol abuse/dependence, drug dependence, and adult antisocial behaviors at age 30 and were also more likely to be unemployed as adults.

This study once again stresses the need for parents to be very conscious of developing in virtue. Temperance and fortitude are virtues that lead to self-control and that can therefore eliminate outbursts of anger. Learning to handle conflict in constructive ways is key to the future health of our children.

For more information describing the work of the study and publications of some of its findings, visit www.simmons.edu/ssw/sls.

Breastfeeding May Reduce the Risk of SIDS



Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is the general term given to the mysterious death of children in their sleep, usually under the age of two. Since the discovery that most SIDS victims slept on their stomachs, the "Back to Sleep" program, which promoted putting babies to sleep on their backs, has reduced the occurrence of SIDS dramatically. Now another potential factor is being researched: breastfeeding.

A study done in Germany of 333 infants who died of SIDS and 998 control infants showed that only 49.6% of infants who died of SIDS had been breastfed, compared with 82.9% of the infants in the control group. The study found a strong link between exclusive (intensive) breastfeeding at the age of 1 month and a 50% reduction in SIDS. Partial breastfeeding had only negligible effects. However, in later months both exclusive and partial breastfeeding cut risk of SIDS in half.

The study led to the researchers to recommend exclusive breastfeeding through the sixth month of age.

There were some weaknesses of this study that may necessitate further verification by future studies. The response rate of the control group was less than ideal. The participants who responded to the survey were more likely to be in a higher socioeconomic bracket than those who failed to respond. Since this was especially true of the control group, another possible cause for the measured difference was introduced. Finally the fact that the study was done months or even years after the target age of the babies may have introduced inaccuracy in the reporting (known as "recall bias").

However, since mothers in lower socioeconomic groups are known to breastfeed much less than mothers in higher socioeconomic groups, the link between breastfeeding and the reduced risk of SIDS remains strong. It will be important for future studies to verify these findings, but mothers are still strongly encouraged to breastfeed through the first six months of their babies' lives.

The German Federal Ministry for Science and Education supported this study from 1998 to 2003. Coauthor E. A. Mitchell, FRACP, DSc, was supported by the Child Health Research Foundation in New Zealand. The other study authors have disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

Pediatrics. 2009;123:e406-e410.

Oral Contraceptive Use Continues to be Linked to Breast Cancer



Critics of the link between oral contraceptive use and breast cancer often point out that all of the studies that show such a link were done before 1990. A recent study shows that the link between oral contraception may still persist after 1990.

The study involved 907 case women (who had taken oral contraception after 1990) and 1711 controls (who had not taken oral contraception). The study found a strong connection between oral contraception use and breast cancer for women who used contraception for one year or more. Further analysis attempting to differentiate among various other factors (including ethnicity and more recent use) showed little differences due to other factors.

"Given the widespread use of oral contraceptives, continued evaluation of their possible health effects may be warranted," Dr. Rosenberg and colleagues conclude.

American Journal of Epidemiology 2009;169:473-479.

Combined Oral Contraceptive Use Linked to Risk for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

Hormones produced within a woman's body have long been thought to contribute to the origins of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE), a disease that causes one's immune system to attack healthy body cells, causing inflammation of the skin or of body organs. Now hormones contained in combined oral contraceptives are being explored as possible causes.

One study found that women who begin taking combined oral contraceptives with ethinyl estradiol are at much higher risk of developing SLE. Higher doses of these hormones increased the risk. Women who have been on this form of oral contraception for extended periods of time had slightly lowered risk factors.

Further studies will be necessary to show a definite connection. This study showed only a small rise in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, even in the highest risk groups taking oral contraceptives. Further weaknesses of the study also require the results to be verified by future studies.

" Limitations of this study include lack of data on racial and socioeconomic status; incomplete information on gynecologic history, which could be a potential confounding factor; and lack of systematic collection of information concerning smoking or drinking habits."

However, the study did succeed in raising an important question that further research should be able to answer: do contraceptive hormones contribute to Lupus?

From Arthritic Care Resource. 2009;61:476–481.

DMPA Causes Significant Weight Gain, Changes in Body Mass

Many users of the injectable contraceptive hormone DMPA (depot medroxyprogesterone acetate) have complained about weight gain and have subsequently discontinued use of the contraceptive. A study of over 700 women now verifies that these complaints have been valid.

In the course of three years, users of DMPA gained an average of 11.2 pounds, compared to the average weight gain of 3.3 to 4.6 pounds by those using other contraceptive methods. This weight gain reflected gain in fatty tissue, not lean tissue, and increased the risk of obesity.

Furthermore, this study showed that after discontinuing use of DMPA, weight gain continued for women who subsequently used oral contraception while weight went down for women who opted for other methods of contraception or for periodic abstinence.

From Am Journal of Obstetricians & Gynecologists. 2009;200:329.e1-329.e8

Marked Decline in Breast Cancer Risk After Stopping EPT

Following the release of the 2002 report of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) trial of estrogen plus progestin, the use of menopausal hormone therapy in the United States decreased substantially. During this time, the incidence of breast cancer also dropped, suggesting a cause-and-effect relation between hormone treatment and breast cancer.

A review of the WHI study found that their findings were indeed valid. The study showed very little increase in breast cancer in the first two years of the study, but a marked increase in the 5.6 year intervention period (double the number of diagnoses in the placebo group). Perhaps more importantly in showing a link between Estrogen Progestin Therapy (EPT) and breast cancer, the risk decreased markedly two years after EPT was discontinued.

While the study controlled for frequency of mammograms and other factors, two important questions remained unasked. First, the EPT was done with estrogen derived from horse urine. Would the results have been any different if "natural estrogen" had been used? Secondly, women in the study took a daily treatment, not adapted to their cycles' natural rhythms. Would the results have been any different with targeted estrogen supplementation?

Despite these questions, the link between EPT as it is usually administered and breast cancer is an important one for us to be aware of.

Soy Protein Not Effective in Preventing Postmenopausal Bone Loss

With the bad reputation of hormone replacement therapy, postmenopausal women have been searching for a solution to the effects of menopause on bone density and body mass. One possible alternative to estrogen is soy isoflavones. Unfortunately, a 2-year randomized study of 203 healthy postmenopausal women has shown that soy isoflavones do not improve bone mass density or physical performance.

from Menopause, April 2009

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Calcium Intake May Protect Against Cancer

The benefits of calcium to a healthy diet have long been known, but the precise link to diets high in calcium and cancer prevention has only been suspected until now. A recent study that gave a dietary survey to 36,965 men and 16,605 women found that a higher intake of calcium and dairy products (up to 1300 mg a day) is associated with a lower incidence of cancers of the gastrointestinal tract (especially colorectal cancer) in both men and women. Additionally, women experienced a reduced risk in all types of cancer with increased calcium intake. Risk of cancer declined in proportion to the amount of calcium consumed, up to 1300 mg a day. There was no measureable increase in benefit for exceeding this amount.

The study did not examine the association with sub-types of cancer tumors of different levels of aggression. The main weakness of the study is that dietary practices were evaluated only once.

"Nevertheless, our study is one of the first cohort studies to examine dairy food and calcium intakes in relation to total cancer as well as low-incidence cancers," the study authors concluded. "Moreover, our prospective design avoids the recall and selection biases that can affect results from case-control studies."

Archives of Internal Medicine. 2009;169:391-401.

Perfluorinated Chemicals May Curb Fertility

Perfluorinated chemicals are chemicals that are combined with the maximum amount of fluorene (a chemical chiefly used in the manufacture of resins and dyes) that the atomic structure of the chemical can hold. These chemicals are found in many manufactured items and in the environment, and are detectable in most humans and animals around the world.

A study measured the amount of perfluorinated chemicals present in the blood of 1240 pregnant women. It found that the higher the levels of these chemicals present in a woman's plasma, the longer it took her to get pregnant.

This study only indicates a general trend, and more studies will need to be done in order to prove a definite cause. However, the trend reveals a possible new environmental threat to human fertility that needs to be seriously looked at.

According to researcher Dr. Fei, "If our results are not chance findings, they have public health relevance for the PFOA and PFOS exposure levels seen in the general population, and they may be one of the new determinants of subfecundity."

Human Reproduction, 2009

Ovulation Induction Associated With Increased Cancer Risk



A study of 15,030 women who gave birth between 1974 and 1976 shows a strong link between drugs that stimulate ovulation and certain kinds of cancer (breast cancer, uterine cancer, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma). The drug clomiphene was especially shown to be linked with these cancers.

The findings of this study are no surprise to those who understand the wholeness of our spiritual and physical health. While ovulation induction is not as morally problematic as in-vitro fertilization and artificial insemination, which remove the creation of new life from the act of marital love, it does treat the woman's fertility as a thing to be manipulated rather than part of her person that needs to be healed when it does not bear fruit. Treating the body like a machine damages the dignity of the human person. It should be no surprise that manipulating the body in ways that it is not intended is likewise physically bad for us.

Study reported in Reuters Health, Feb 25, 2009