

The Truth About the Morning After Pill:

Packet for the Food and Drug Administration
Regarding the Hearing Scheduled
For December 16, 2003



Distributed by:
Gainesville Area National Organization for Women
NOW New York State Reproductive Rights Taskforce
University of Florida Campus NOW

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To whom it may concern:

Please find enclosed an introduction and testimonies of women from across the country who chose to share their personal experiences with birth control and the Morning After Pill. The Morning After Pill is one way for women to prevent pregnancy. In order to have full control over our bodies and our futures, ALL reproductive options must be readily available to us, including the Morning After Pill and abortion.

Women are the experts on our lives, and we are the ones whom your decision will affect. Therefore, the FDA needs to listen to us when we say that the Morning After Pill should be available over-the-counter.

Sincerely,

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Introduction

In recent months, women from the NOW New York State Reproductive Rights Taskforce, Gainesville Area NOW, and University of Florida Campus NOW have been speaking out from our own experiences as to why we need the Morning After Pill available over-the-counter. We believe women in the United States should be able to walk into any store and buy the Morning After Pill without a prescription— a right that women in Sri Lanka, Denmark, Norway, Kenya, and 23 other countries already have. In fact, Britain distributes the Morning After Pill in schools to girls 16 and under. In France, the Morning After Pill is free!

The NYS Reproductive Rights Taskforce, Gainesville Area NOW, and Campus NOW have used the tool of Consciousness-Raising (or C-R) to gather women's personal testimonies on birth control and the Morning After Pill. We did this to get clearer on the issues that most affect us, and to make sure that our demands stem from the oppression we experience in our personal lives. A speakout is a public Consciousness-Raising, and we choose to speakout based on our belief that WOMEN are the experts on our lives— not doctors, pharmacists, politicians, not the FDA— but especially not men!

Based on C-R conclusions from women across the country (and from women in our own chapters), we need greater access to the Morning After Pill, or emergency contraception. The Morning After Pill (MAP) is basically a higher dose of daily birth control pills that can be taken up to 120 hours after sex to prevent pregnancy, but its effectiveness lessen the longer we wait. Women need immediate, over-the-counter access to the Morning After Pill— both because we face countless obstacles to obtaining the Morning After Pill— and because women shouldn't be told when, or under what circumstances, we can control our bodies.

Some of the obstacles we face to obtaining the Morning After Pill include:

1. Lack of publicity of MAP, and fear due to misinformation. One woman completed pharmacy school at the University of Florida without ever hearing about the Morning After Pill. Another woman said:

"I decided not to get the Morning After Pill because I was very busy and would have to take time to wait at the doctor's office. And I had heard that it would make you sick and vomit for days. I got pregnant and got an abortion a few months later. Since then I've taken MAP several times and I never got sick."

We have also found that health care providers consistently play up the possible side effects of the Morning After Pill, while at the same time down-playing the side effects of birth control pills. One woman was discouraged from using the Morning After Pill by her healthcare provider because of possible "harmful effects," while that same healthcare provider actually *encouraged* her to go back on birth control pills.

2. Another obstacle to getting the Morning After Pill is difficulty finding clinics or pharmacies open when we've needed it, especially if the condom broke on a Friday night or over the holidays, when doctors' offices are closed.
3. Many women also testified about the outrageous time and cost of required doctor's visits in order to get the MAP. One woman in New York said:

"I had to pay \$150 for an exam, plus \$11 for the Morning After Pill because my insurance doesn't cover either. It does, however, cover Viagra and vasectomies."

4. And finally, many women testified in C-Rs that men don't take their fair share of responsibility for pregnancy prevention. Men frequently leave us with the burden of buying and supplying birth control, and are often resistant to wearing condoms or getting vasectomies. One woman said:

"I had a boyfriend who didn't want to use condoms... I wanted to use condoms, but he basically wore me down and one time we didn't use anything."

Women need full access to all forms of birth control, including the Morning After Pill and abortion. The right to control when and if we have a child is a cornerstone of our freedom and self-determination as women. Therefore, Gainesville Area NOW, Campus NOW, and the NOW NYS Reproductive Rights Taskforce demand:

1. Unrestricted, unlimited, over-the-counter access to the Morning After Pill for all women (regardless of age). Every drug store should stock it!
2. That men take their fair share of responsibility for birth control by wearing condoms without resistance, and without waiting for us to ask. Men also need to pay for *at least* half of the method of birth control we use, and get checked for STDs *at least* once a year.
3. That the public health care system provide the Morning After Pill for free— as it does with condoms— and advertise availability and accurate information about the Morning After Pill.
4. Healthcare providers give us non-judgmental, factual, and accurate information about all forms of birth control and their side effects. We further demand that healthcare providers ask *men* what method of birth control *they're* using.
5. The government stop rolling back our abortion rights! The passage of a federal ban on D&X abortion procedures amounts to a full-scale assault on women's reproductive freedom, and we're not going to stand for it!
6. That reproductive choices be kept in women's hands— not the hands of the medical community, the government, or men.

Testimonies

Kelly, Florida

I've been on the pill since I was 18. The whole reason I got on the pill in the first place was because my boyfriend insisted that he "couldn't keep it up" with a condom on. He told me that I would just have to get on the pill— I just had to— so I did. I hated it from the start. I got varicose veins in my arms and legs, and I gained almost 35 lbs in a year and a half. I'm now 50 lbs heavier than I was before I started college three years ago.

After hearing another woman in a C-R talk about how her partner paid for half of the birth control pills she took, I went home and asked my partner to do the same. He got very pissed off, and said, "I don't remember agreeing to that!" No, of course he didn't. He just pressured me to get on the pill so that he could have better sex, and then didn't want to take any responsibility for it.

And after hearing women testify about how their own partners' "erection problems" miraculously disappeared after they withheld sex, I realized that my partner had been using this as a tactic all along so that he could have sex without having to use a condom. I stopped taking birth control, but he still resisted wearing condoms, and we never had sex again.

My next partner supplied and paid for the condoms we used. Three times condoms have come off inside me. Two of those times I used the Morning After Pill (the last time because I was taking antibiotics, which lessen the effectiveness of my birth control pills). I have never had any side effects from MAP, and I've never gotten pregnant either.

I bought MAP from the campus infirmary to have on hand incase I ever needed it, but the first time I felt like I was being judged by the nurse, who asked prying questions about the nature of my relationship with my partner, and how long I had known him. I felt so embarrassed about it that I lied and said I had known him longer than I actually had. She made me feel slutty and irresponsible, even though I knew that by getting the Morning After Pill, I was actually BEING responsible, because I didn't want to get pregnant.

If the Morning After Pill was available over-the-counter, I wouldn't have to spend time and money making doctor's appointments every time I needed it, or even if I just wanted to stock up. I also wouldn't feel like I'm being judged by nurses/doctors because I'm not using the type of contraception THEY think I ought to be using. If I could really control my fertility— meaning 24 hours a day, and without needing my doctor's permission first— then I would have more time, more money, and more personal freedom. Basically, I'd have more control over my life.

Alex, New York

I got pregnant when I was 23. It was three years after I first got involved in NOW. I was having sex with my boyfriend, and we used condoms for birth control. I had been using condoms because I thought they were my best bet at protecting me from catching anything. Trying to get him to wear the condoms was another story—I struggled with him and made him wear them.

After about a year of going out, the condom came off inside of me while we were having sex. I hold him responsible for that, because I felt something different, so it seems like he must have known something was different too. Why didn't he tell me the condom was off until AFTER he came?

I knew I was midway between my periods, and so there was a good chance that I could get pregnant. I considered getting the Morning After Pill just.... I decided not to get the Morning After Pill that time because I heard that it makes you throw up a lot, and because I was very busy and didn't want to take the time to wait at the infirmary to see a doctor to get a prescription.

I got pregnant and had an abortion a few months later, which took up a lot more of my time. I also had months of feeling awkward and tired, and it cost over \$400.

Now, I had just finished LEADING a campaign a year earlier at the University of Florida to get a pharmacist fired for refusing to prescribe the Morning After Pill. But even with all of my activism to increase access to the MAP, I still didn't know that the [side effects were] over-hyped. I hadn't heard women talk about taking [MAP], like we're doing here today.

And so my fear due to misinformation kept me from taking [MAP]. This is why I *know* that women need to speak out from our OWN experiences with the Morning After Pill and birth control, to find out what's REALLY going on.

Since that time, I've taken the Morning After Pill five different times when my birth control didn't work. I now make sure I always have it in my medicine cabinet— usually I've got[ten] it for free through the feminist "underground" market— friends of mine in healthcare give me free samples. Because I have it on hand, the stress of taking it has gone way down. I've never thrown up, and had little or no side effects each time. Twice I've had the side effect of jitteriness, like being on cold medicine. That's my only side effect. And it's much cheaper with much LESS side effects of weeks of waiting and feeling like your body isn't your own if you get pregnant, and having to either have an abortion or give birth at the end of that time.

Lynn, Florida

I am usually very careful about birth control, but I got very tired of condoms, and one day my husband and I didn't use one. Then I checked my calendar and realized that it was a risky time of the month for me, so I got very worried. I was positive that I did not want to have another child. I have two girls (4 and 6) and they are all I can handle. While writing this, it occurs to me that it doesn't really even matter, and it isn't really anyone else's business why I needed the Morning After Pill, but just that I needed it. Whether a condom broke or wasn't used, or other birth control failed, is inconsequential when it comes to my reproductive choices.

So now, I realized that I had to take the Morning After Pill, and began by calling my friend for advice. She had extra birth control pills and offered them to me. When we realized that they had expired and might not work, I decided to call my doctor. I saw my general practitioner and felt very uncomfortable having to explain my situation. I felt like a little kid who had done something wrong and had to wait and hope the doctor would help make it right. I was at her mercy— she could say no....

Luckily, she agreed to prescribe the pill to me. I then started to worry about the side effects. Would I get really sick and nauseated? Would the next four days be hell? I felt I was taking a chance, but it was a lot better than waiting out the month, and if I were pregnant, having to get an abortion. I had rough pregnancies and there was no way I wanted to go through that again, and then still try to take care of my children while on bed rest.

The next step was to go to my pharmacy and buy the pills. I was shocked to find out that [most stores] didn't carry it. I called about five pharmacies before I found a Walgreen's that sold the pills. They were expensive, but luckily my health insurance paid some of the cost.

It gave me great peace of mind when I took the pills and knew I wasn't going to get pregnant. I didn't get sick from them, and continued my daily life of taking care of my children. I am thankful that I knew the Morning After Pill was out there, and that I managed to get access to it. I believe that all women should be told about it and have access to MAP, whether they are rich or poor. It can definitely change the course of a woman's life.

Stephanie, Florida

A couple summers ago, I lived in France for a study abroad. Some friends and I were out at a bar one night off on a side street, it was late, like 1 a.m. The bars there are inside/outside a lot of times, and we were at a table outside by the street when these guys in white t-shirts that said "AIDES" (which means "help" in French) rode up on bikes with little carts attached to them, and stopped next to the tables. No one else seemed to think anything much of it. A couple people walked up to them, it seemed, as though it was a normal occurrence. I figured maybe they were selling glo-sticks or ice cream or something.

When they came to our table, I saw that they were giving out stuff (condoms to be exact, and little packets of pills). We all thought the condoms were funny— they had the Eiffel Tower on the package and said "Official Condom of France"— but we thought the pills were weird. We decided they must be aspirin for the hangovers we would have the next day.

The next morning I told my host mother about it, and asked her what the pills were. She tried to explain it to me in French I could understand. What I understood was, it's the "if-you-think-you-might-be-pregnant-and-don't-want-to-be" pill. She asked if we had it in America (she knew that we didn't have RU-486). I told her that we did, but we had to go to a doctor and get a prescription for it. She grunted, as she often did when she was amazed at something I told her about the United States. Among other things, it didn't seem possible to her that I could work AND go to school and the same time, and that I even had to pay the money [student loans] back to government later.

[In the U.S.], the time I needed the Morning After Pill, I had to brave the football-game-day traffic to go to the infirmary, which turned out to be closed. I had to just pray that I wouldn't get pregnant, and luckily, I didn't. How great it would have been if I had just had the Morning After Pill lying around my house from some night out at a bar!

Erin, New York

It is important that reproductive choice (here we're talking about the Morning After Pill) be available to all women and girls, regardless of age. This story is not about me, but it could have been. I grew up in a small, conservative midwestern city where sex Ed was abstinence and condoms were kept in a glass case at the pharmacy. Armed with only a blurb in Cosmo about the Morning After Pill, my best friend and I drove early [one] morning to the Planned Parenthood located on the outskirts of town, where it stood guarded from view by trees. The idea was to get in and out quickly: you didn't want anyone to see your car in the parking lot. We were lucky enough to beat the anti-choice protesters, but not the other customers. She put her name down on the list and waited, and we worried. We waited three hours. We worried: Would the pill still work by the time she got in there?

Finally, her name was called and she disappeared into a back room. When she returned 45 minutes later, her eyes were red. She whispered to me: "They wouldn't give it to me without an exam, and I'd never done one of those before. It hurt." She hadn't been prepared for it. She wrote a check for it all, though the account was new and she didn't have money in it yet. We frantically called her boyfriend to put up the money right away. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to come up with it in time and her account was overdrawn. Her mother, who had cosigned on the account since my friend was only fifteen, got a phone call from the bank explaining that the money was not in the account for a check written to Planned Parenthood. Her Christian fundamentalist parents made a lot of threats, but she was fortunate only to be grounded. Her relationship with her parents remained strained until she graduated from high school.

Though I never had to use the Morning After Pill, I certainly understand the need for it. Though women who use the Morning After Pill are often called irresponsible, my story, which follows, indicates the need for men and boys to take responsibility for contraception as well.

My own story was not with a boyfriend, where it would have been even more difficult to stand up for myself. And had this not been my first sexual encounter with a guy, perhaps I wouldn't have had the courage to refuse intercourse. Here's what happened:

Things were getting hot and heavy and he wanted to have intercourse. I could tell because, though slowly and gently, he was coming close to entering me. I asked him if he had a condom. He sat up sharply, asking, "Aren't you on the pill?"

"No, I'm not," I replied.

"Well that's really irresponsible!" He chastised me. "You could get pregnant from using only condoms!"

"But you can get an STD if you don't use them," I answered. He looked at me disgusted. "You have an STD?" he asked.

"No."

"So you're assuming I do?" he asked.

"No, but it's best to be safe."

He breathed heavily and said, "You didn't seem like that kind of girl when I met you." Before asking what he meant, I left.

Sara, New York

I have used contraceptives extremely regularly ever since I first became sexually active. I chose to use contraception because I don't want to risk getting pregnant before I'm ready to raise a child. When I used condoms, my partners didn't play any role besides agreeing to wear the condom— and even then, some of my partners have been less than enthusiastic.

My only long term relationship with a guy so far was with a man who insisted on switching from condoms to the pill practically the instant we decided to become monogamous and knew for sure we were both free of STD's. He insisted on this, despite the fact that hormonal birth control makes me extremely nauseated, no matter which brand my doctor prescribes. His rationale, in addition to the sexual benefits for him, was that condoms are "too expensive". Though he felt it was his duty to be involved with my contraceptive choices, he did not feel obligated to help me pay \$40 per month for birth control pills— pills that made me sick— pills I only considered taking after he insisted, we stopped using condoms.

My then-boyfriend's main involvement with my contraceptive choice consisted of daily reminders and lectures about taking my pill on time, as well as frequent admonishments about me having to pay for an abortion if I got pregnant after forgetting a pill. He was not nearly as committed to finding a method of contraception that worked for both of us, or to taking care of me when the hormones in my daily pill made me throw up. We continued in this way for almost three years, until we broke up and I stopped taking birth control pills.

Throughout my time using contraception, I haven't had much trouble getting access, outside of financial issues and uncooperative partners. I'm not too shy to go into a drugstore and ask for a box of condoms, and [when] I [was] a college student, they were available free in my school's health center. My mother was more than happy to help me get a prescription for birth control pills, and my doctor had no problems prescribing them to a young, unmarried woman for explicitly contraceptive reasons, even though he is conservative in many other ways.

I've never used a diaphragm, and luckily I've never had a condom break. However, I have forgotten pills in the past. It's easy to conveniently forget to take your daily dose of a drug that makes you violently ill. When I forgot a pill, I would ask my partner to use a condom, or simply abstain from sex. My ex-boyfriend would generally get angry, accuse me of being untrustworthy and irresponsible, and suggest that I go on an even more harmful form of hormonal birth control such as Depo-Provera (rather than simply agreeing to share the responsibility by going back to condoms).

The only time I haven't used contraception was when I was raped. It's pretty hard to get someone who's raping you to get up and put on a condom. I think it's pretty self-explanatory what kind of role the guy played in that situation.

Linda, New York

I did not hear of the Morning After Pill until I was in college. I remember obtaining a small card that had written across the front, "Emergency contraception: for a location near you phone...." and it listed a number. I placed that card in my wallet and I have had it ever since. It is now a bit tattered and torn, but all the information is still there. On many occasions, I have given that information to friends or family members who have asked for it. However, when I was in "search" of the Morning After Pill, I did not have my trusty, dusty card with me.

I had just moved to New York from Ohio, and was in my first semester of graduate school. One weekend, my boyfriend came to visit me. I found myself in need of the Morning After Pill, and I did not have the number. What I did have were the New York City yellow pages. I let my fingers do the walking, and I began dialing health care centers that were listed in the yellow pages to inquire about the Morning After Pill. What I found was astonishing.

My search for the Morning After Pill was neither affordable nor accessible. When I began calling health centers, I found that the cost of the MAP was \$50 to \$125, which included the doctor visit. \$50 was way out of my league. I barely had enough money to get to the subway and make it to school and work. \$125 was ridiculously expensive. What exactly was I getting for my money and for my time? I would have to wait in a doctor's office and have a doctor ask me intrusive questions and then give me a prescription for two pills. Two pills that I had knowledge about, knew how to take, knew the side effects of, and also knew that I needed to take the pills within the first 72 hours after having sex (this is the time in which the pills are the most effective in preventing fertilization). I was on the clock. It was Monday morning when I started making my calls. I knew that on Sunday... health clinics and doctors' offices... are all closed. I kept calling around, hoping that I would find a more affordable price.

Why is it that men can call their doctors and obtain five free Viagra pills— in case a man finds his "equipment" is not quite up to par, or if he just wants to have the pills on hand— but I can't get two pills for less than \$50?!

As the day went on, I began to get a little desperate. I needed to access the Morning After Pill. I spoke to a few students on campus, who informed me that the university had a student health center. Before this time, I did not know that the clinic existed. There weren't any signs posted around campus advertising the health center. The services were not listed in the student handbook or in the orientation packet. However, I phoned the center and was told that they did provide the Morning After Pill, and that I should come into the center right away. The cost was minimal; approximately \$5 to \$10, and my insurance would cover the cost of the office visit. I was relieved. I went to the clinic and was able to get what I needed without any intrusive, judgmental questions, and at a price that I could afford. I was lucky. Not all women are as lucky as I was to be able to access the Morning After Pill

The Morning After Pill should be affordable, accessible, and available over-the-counter without restriction.

Anonymous

I'm going to talk about trying to get guys to wear condoms, and why I think something has to change. I haven't had the "perfect" partner on condoms yet, so I think this can be a general demand— all guys, shape up on this issue! Our experience shows why we need the MAP as a backup— because of hassles that men often give us trying to get them to wear condoms.

One way in which I am personally kept down by men I've slept with is in being the one who has to worry about birth control. Since I've been 19, the kind of birth control I like to use is condoms, because I know they are my best bet at protecting me from STD's. Before I was 19, I was content to be on the birth control pill, because my boyfriend and I had both been virgins, and I didn't have to worry about catching anything....

But when I started to sleep with other men, I got really concerned that I'd catch something, and was also tired of the mood swings and weight gain from the pill, so I decided to stop the pill and use condoms....

By the time I started going out with my next boyfriend, I was really used to condoms. The first few times we slept together, he would lose his erection when he or I put a condom on him. After a few times of this happening, I asked him what he did about losing his erection. He said that most women gave up on trying to make him wear a condom. Did he think this would make me give up, too? Instead, this terrified me and made me even more committed to making him wear one. He had slept with quite a few other women, and that gave me a great motivation to make him wear them.

I told him I'd just wait. After a couple of weeks, he did get over this problem. Then, eventually, in our relationship, I noticed a downward trend. Every few times we had sex, though, he'd lose his erection, so this always made me tense up during sex— would he lose it? He also pressured me to go on the pill or another form of birth control, but I resisted.

He would put extra pressure on me during my period not to wear condoms, when I was less likely to get pregnant, so sometimes I'd give in. It was a little more fun and exciting when we had sex without them, but I think that was mostly because he was so much more aggressive and into it without them, which made sex more fun for me. It was like he was *rewarding* me for not making him wear condoms.

Hearing my friends and women in my feminist group joking about how guys lose their erection as soon as you pull a condom out made me realize that other women have this problem, too. It was not just my personal struggle with my boyfriend. This made me understand how I was being screwed over and gave me the courage to talk about "my problem" publicly, so other women could also see this wasn't their personal problem. And seeing that my boyfriend could change on losing his erection (after I decided I would just wait until he got over the "condom problem") made me understand that this wasn't just a male biological problem he was having....

When I became single again, several of the guys I slept with resisted using condoms, even tricked me into not wearing them. One of them grabbed a condom, but he never put one on. I didn't find this out until after he came out of me. He only seemed to be concerned about me getting pregnant. I was also worried about this, and had to go through a nervous, stressful day of taking the Morning After Pill, [wondering], would I get pregnant?

The theme here is that I always have to be the one pushing for the guy to wear condoms, and he is usually resisting me, or at best, not taking the responsibility and making me be the one to say "put it on." It's an ongoing struggle; it makes sex less fun for me, and puts me on constant guard in bed. I literally have to guard men from going inside of me until I get a condom on them! It's not right that I have to go through this struggle.

Lisa, New York

I believe it is unacceptable to view access to the morning after pill as any less important than access to other form of contraception, such as condoms or the pill. The access component is key; it is, in fact, crucial that the Morning After Pill be readily available to women, given that it must be taken so quickly after unprotected sex. Doesn't it seem counter-intuitive that 'emergency' contraception is more difficult (and expensive) to obtain than other contraceptives?

In my own experience, an hour of waiting in a women's clinic (having made an appointment earlier in the day) resulted in a quote of over \$200 to obtain the Morning After Pill, leading to my reluctant decision to 'just risk it.' I was lucky that I did not become pregnant, but not unaware of the unfairness of having to make such a choice. Women do not have reproductive freedom when the timing, cost, information, and other criteria that we need to exercise it are so out of reach.

Even if we are successful in getting the access we deserve to the Morning After Pill, there remain barriers to reproductive autonomy (and more broadly, gender equality)...

Thankfully, most of my own partners used condoms automatically and supplied their own. But I have known a couple of men, one of whom was otherwise quite intelligent and thoughtful, who skipped over the condom introduction. In one notable case, while out with a man on a first date, I tried to sneak my birth control pill from purse to mouth without him noticing... In this instance, it was late, there was a lot of wine involved, and I accidentally dropped the pill. For a few minutes I fumbled around for it casually, but after a while I had to cave in to his repeated offers for assistance in finding what I was looking for. Some time later when did we decide to have sex, this guy proceeded right along to penetration without any move to discuss or produce a condom. When I asked him about it, he said, "Well, I knew that you were on the pill."

The need for the Morning After Pill is not measurable. A woman cannot know for sure if she is pregnant until after it is too late for the Morning After Pill to be effective. So we cannot know how often we really needed to take it to beyond doubt avoid pregnancy, or how many times we will need to in the future... We need to be extremely vocal, extremely clear, and totally unwavering in demanding greater access to the Morning After Pill.

Camille, Florida

I have taken birth control pills for the past four years, and I have also used condoms during the few instances when I have gone off the pills for a few weeks. My partner sometimes pays for my pills, and he also provides the condoms when we use them. Throughout the years, the pills have become more and more expensive and my insurance company stopped paying for them a few months ago. Now pay \$30 a month for the prescription.

I have forgotten to take my pill on a number of occasions, and it is always a huge hassle to catch up. I often become very nauseous and sick because of doubling up. I usually also have this reaction when I take the first pill [at the beginning of the] month. I can't tell you how much I dread taking that pill for fear of becoming so violently ill. Birth control pills have also made the symptoms of my period much worse. I've told my doctor about all of these symptoms on a number of occasions, and he said they were mild and to be expected when using birth control pills. He also would not discuss alternative pills because he said he was the most informed and had the most faith in the pill I am on. I recently began to wonder if he sees these symptoms as the price women must pay for wanting to take birth control.

There have been two instances when I have realized that I forgot to take a pill and my period came a bit late. Both of these times I became very nervous and I took a pregnancy test. These were times when I was unaware of the existence of the Morning After Pill, and I think I would have utilized it if I had had easy access to it. I know it would have eased my nervousness while waiting to take the test. However, because I was in high school, I doubt I would have gone to the doctor and asked for a prescription because of fear of my parents finding out. I can imagine there are many women in that position today, who would be able to take the Morning After Pill if it were over the counter.

I first heard about the Morning After Pill while being involved in [University of Florida] Campus NOW [National Organization for Women]. Before this, I only had a vague notion of the Morning After Pill's existence, and I thought it was the same thing as RU-486— the abortion pill. Even after finding out the actual purpose of the Morning After Pill, I believed the myths about the horrible side affects it brings. I, of course, know now that there is no reason for other women to not be aware of their options or not to be able to access the Morning After Pill whenever needed, without a prescription.

Vera, Florida

I am a sophomore [in college]. My first and only experience with the Morning After Pill so far happened last spring. My partner and I were having protected sex when the condom came off. I was panicked because I was on no other birth control. Luckily, a few weeks before that, I had attended a Campus [National Organization for Women] meeting that had discussed the Morning After Pill. It was in this meeting that I found out how I could receive the Morning After Pill. I called the university infirmary and was able to get a same-day appointment.

The whole visit to the infirmary took about thirty minutes. The doctor did not ask me any intrusive questions or admonish me for needing the pill. She simply took my vitals and gave me the prescription. The infirmary pharmacy took about fifteen minutes to fill the prescription. I received no side effects from the pill at all. I have not been able to go on any form of birth control pill because the medical world does not offer one pill for a woman suffering from high blood pressure.

Through Consciousness-Raising, I realized that I had an incredibly pleasant experience with the Morning After Pill [compared to other women]. But, it was student feminists before me who fought for me to have a pleasant experience. But, the problem I have is what am I going to do when I am *not* a student anymore? What happens when I'm a mother or a grandmother or a professional? Does that mean that I have to endure some of the same horror stories that I heard about from other women? If so, that's extremely unfair. As a woman, I should be allowed equal accessibility to the Morning After Pill, no matter what station in my life. Any compromise of the right of women to be able to attain the Morning After Pill affordably, and without the permission of a medical physician, is blatant discrimination [against] women, and our rights to control our bodies.

Ileana, Florida

I've only had to use the Morning After Pill once, when I was 17 and still in high school. I wasn't on the pill and the condom broke. I didn't want to take a chance, even though I am pretty sure that I wouldn't have gotten pregnant. My boyfriend called a couple places, including Wal-mart [which refuses to fill prescriptions for the Morning After Pill] and was told something like "You can't get it here at all," or "That's only available in France."

Obviously these employees were equating the MAP with the abortion pill [RU-486]. Finally, I called Planned Parenthood, [which] told me that it was available, but I would have to wait for a slot to open up that day to meet with a gynecologist first. If it hadn't been a Saturday, I would have had trouble getting an excused absence from school. After a long, nervous wait of two hours, I was seen by a gynecologist. She took my blood pressure and asked me a series of questions, including "Are you using contraception?"

The whole visit, including the pills, cost me around \$80. My boyfriend paid for half of it. I would have liked him to wait with me [at the clinic], but he had to work. Fortunately, I never became pregnant, but it would have been so much easier and cheaper if I could have gotten [the Morning After Pill] over the counter.

Jessica, New York

I've been lucky. I've never had to take the Morning After Pill, partly because I've never had a condom break and because I use birth control pills as my back up to condoms. I didn't know the Morning After Pill even existed until my senior year in college, so birth control pills seemed like a good option as a back-up form of protection. It was easy to obtain pills in college because I was covered by my parents' health insurance and it only cost \$10 each month. However, once I graduated from college and took a job, it wasn't so easy. I had different insurance that no longer treated all pills the same and I had to pay \$35 for the type of pill I was prescribed. This led me back to my doctor to receive a prescription for the generic form of my pill so that I would only have to pay \$15 each month, which I could afford.

The only problem was that the generic form of my pill gave me migraines, so I went back to the doctor a few months later and asked for another pill. Since I have been out of college, I have been prescribed 4 different kinds of birth control pills. Not only is this stressful, it would be totally unnecessary if I could obtain the Morning After Pill easily. On top of the money it would save me each month, I would no longer have to worry about remembering to take my pill at the same time each day to ensure it's effectiveness, or wonder what to do if I am sick one month and taking antibiotics (which lessen the pill's effectiveness). If a condom breaks the month you've missed, or been late on a few pills, or been taking antibiotics, you still have a chance of getting pregnant and would have to go to your doctor for the Morning After Pill as a back-up to your back-up. I would love for every woman to no longer have to worry about these things and be able to find the Morning After Pill over-the-counter. Contraception options like condoms for men are accessible and affordable—women should have the same choices available to them.

Anonymous

I've almost always used contraceptives to prevent pregnancy during in a serious relationship, and to avoid pregnancy and prevent STDs in casual ones. Most of the men have been extremely responsible about contraceptives. The few who weren't were absolutely careless.

[The times I've used MAP were] in one very long-term relationship, [when] we got careless. In another case, the condom broke, and the guy took it off without letting me know. I was with the [him] a few more times, not safe any of the times. I was careless. I was not used to being with someone who didn't take equal responsibility for safe sex.

[Once when a condom broke] we went to a women's clinic to get the Morning After Pill. He was emotionally supportive and we decided that we would share the cost of the visit and the pill evenly. My experience taking the MAP was fairly painless, in terms of access. My partner was a really nice, supportive man, and I only had to go through it once. I liked having the ability to minimize a potentially catastrophic situation. I'm glad that I had an option. We were practicing safe sex, and I would have had to have an abortion. I don't think I would have been able to handle that well. I was a worse case scenario in terms of how it affected me. I think the pill is a great idea but have never been tempted to take it because of the notion of continually injecting hormones in my body. When I took the MAP, I felt nauseous, I vomited, had diarrhea, the works. But if a case like that occurred again, I would take it again in a heartbeat.

Erika, New York

I've been taking birth control pills for the last six years. Recently, due to financial difficulties, and because I am not in a long-term relationship, I decided to go off the pill. Last month, I had protected sex and the condom broke. As is usually the case, I only found out about this after the fact. Since this occurred during an especially vulnerable time in my cycle, I was very worried that I might be pregnant. Not knowing what to do— and not having the money or time to see a doctor to get the morning after pill prescribed— I waited for my period, which was supposed to come the following week. It didn't come.

After two weeks, I was even more worried— I had heard that taking a bunch of birth control pills could work in the same manner as taking one, lower dose Morning After Pill, so I took five pills that I had leftover (much to the dismay of my digestive/nervous system) and waited. A week later, I fortunately got my period. I don't know what I would have done had I been pregnant. I can't afford to have an abortion right now— I'm working three jobs just to make my rent payment and buy groceries— much less have a child. By making the Morning After Pill over-the-counter, you would remove much of the difficulty of accessing it and the potential danger that is posed to millions of women who can't afford to see a doctor (and thus must find other, potentially harmful, 'solutions').

As I see it, the only difference between taking a pill once a day, everyday and taking a pill only after the unwitting occurrence of unprotected sex is that a woman does not have to use half her paycheck nor schedule an expensive appointment with a doctor to protect herself from pregnancy. The AMA has stated that Morning After Pill has been found to be a safe way to prevent an unintentional pregnancy— women in 27 other countries already have over-the-counter access to this technology. We need to join these countries in giving women this right.

Elliot, Texas

Growing up in Texas, I experienced my first pregnancy at 15 years old, knowing absolutely nothing about sex or birth control. As an unmarried high school sophomore, I was given an early term D&C by my mom's gynecologist/obstetrician.

I used the pill from then on, but sloppily (since it made me feel very ill, and I would sometimes "forget" to take it), and my high school boyfriend would not use a condom. My second pregnancy— and the one that haunts me to this day— went unnoticed by me until the 5th month, when I had to fly to Atlanta for a partial-birth abortion in the only clinic that would, at that time, perform such a thing. I was 17.

My third pregnancy arrived later, at 23, while I was faithfully using the contraceptive sponge. The sponge popped out while I was having intercourse, and I knew right away that I was in trouble. Traumatized by my second abortion, I went to the doctor immediately, tested positive for pregnancy, and was told that the doctor would not perform an abortion before the 5th week, for safety reasons...

I have spent my 30-year reproductive life as someone with an unfortunate combination of qualities: over-sensitive to the hormones in birth control pills, and highly prone to pregnancy.

[I am] now the mother of an 8 year-old daughter, born at a time in my life when I was ready for this responsibility... [But] what would the legislators of morality make of my life, [if] given the power? Make me a baby farm for adoptive couples? Force me to produce and attempt to raise children that I was financially and emotionally unprepared to care for?

Linda, New York

I was involved in a fairly new, romantic, and sexual relationship with someone when I had my experience with a broken condom. We were both panicked because this was the first time that this had happened to either of us. Fortunately, he was extremely concerned about my emotional state, and did as much as he could to keep me calm. I was living on my own so there wasn't the added pressure of having to sneak around behind my parents' backs— which I, without question, would have had to do.

After a restless evening, I called a women's center in Chicago, where I was living at the time. The woman I spoke with explained generally how the Morning After Pill works and scheduled an appointment for me. The next morning, I ... met with a counselor, received a prescription, and left within a half an hour. Coming from a fairly conservative background, I was relieved that there was not even a hint of 'preachiness' or self-righteousness by the counselor. She made sure I understood what the MAP would do, and informed me about other contraceptive options that I had. The clinic had a blind payment policy, where you gave what you could. [My partner and I] both gave what we could, which wasn't as much as I would have liked.

The clinic was a Godsend for me at the time. And it is the type of place ... that should be available and easily accessible everywhere and to everyone. They made what could have been a painful experience into a tolerable one.... Although the side effects of the pill was pretty strong with me, I cannot describe in words how much relief I experienced knowing that I had that option— that an accident was not going to irreparably steer my life in a direction I was not ready to take.

Reena, New York

I would like to speak about my experience with Emergency Contraception (or the Morning After Pill), as well as the issue of birth control pills and condom use. I have had positive experiences in [all] areas, luckily, and I believe all women should have as their right... access and acceptance for whichever methods they choose. I used the Emergency Contraception when I was in college. The condom broke over the weekend and since I knew about MAP, I called my health center to get it, I think on a Sunday. The clinician was helpful and informative, and although I was already knowledgeable about how to use this method, I appreciated her simple instructions and lack of judgment. She asked me if I was on birth control pills and when I said no, I didn't want to be, she didn't push the issue. It only cost \$12, and I recommended it to all of my friends. I had no real side effects aside from mild nausea. I think a common misconception is that if the MAP is over-the-counter, everyone will use it like candy... Things happen, and women need all resources at their disposal to control their reproductive destiny.

The second issue that I want to discuss is condom use. I have not really had resistance to condom use and actually have explained to the guy that he should pay for condoms or birth control pills. As I see it, if I am going to face a possible pregnancy, then I think that it is a fair trade-off for a guy to bear the financial responsibility. Otherwise, what does he really have to think about? At least if a guy pays for contraception, he has some responsibility.

At the end of the day, I believe that women should not have to fight for their inherent [sic] right to control their bodies— it should be an expectation. Politics should not be played on women's bodies— that is something that women and men need to demand.

Pam, Florida

I feel very lucky to be one of the women who have never had any problems with the birth control pill. I have been on it 3 years and I have yet to experience any bad side effects. Until I started attending consciousness-raising with Campus NOW and Gainesville Area NOW, it had never occurred to me that my partner should pay for half of it. I always thought the pill was something I was supposed to take care of.

Since I moved to Gainesville, I stopped being in a "committed" relationship, so now condoms also play a big role in my sex life. In the beginning I felt that condoms were supposed to be supplied by guys. I figured if I took the pill that they should bring the condoms. But soon enough I realized that a lot of guys are not exactly happy to wear condoms, and will go to great lengths to avoid them.

So since I'm not very good at remembering to take my pills (since I stopped having a boyfriend), condoms are absolutely necessary, so I make sure that I have them also. When I come across a guy who refuses to wear condoms, it makes me very angry and totally kills the mood. I refuse to have the "but I can't feel anything," or the "don't worry, I'm clean" conversation anymore.

If I have to spend 5 minutes trying to convince someone of something that should not even be an issue, I think I'd rather not have sex. Plus, the part that really baffles me is that they aren't worried about catching AIDS or any other sexually transmitted disease.

What is really funny though is that when a guy is really good about wearing condoms (i.e. puts one on without me having to say anything), I am amazed and very happy— as if I'd just found the perfect guy. This is absolutely ridiculous because putting on a condom should be automatic in the day and age we live in, and the fact that I feel "lucky" to find a guy who puts on a condom by himself without having to be told is very sad.

I've never taken the Morning After Pill because I have been on birth control pills for a while. Even when I have forgotten to take the pills (which happens at least once a month) I've never had a pregnancy scare since I always also use condoms and I've never had one break. There have been a few times that I worried I might be pregnant, but never enough to make me want to do something about it, like take the Morning After Pill or pay for a pregnancy test.

This summer I was visiting my friends and family in Argentina and I found out that although the Morning After Pill is prescribed there (so is everything else, including aspirin), the Morning After Pill does [can be prescribed by a pharmacist], and anybody can go and get it in any pharmacy without any problems.

When I found that out, it made me very angry because even a country where abortion is illegal, they have the Morning After Pill readily available and we don't. When I came back to Gainesville after my trip, I found out about the Morning After Pill campaign, which was perfect because I want the Morning After Pill to be over-the-counter and sold everywhere right NOW!