

## **The Effects of Hormonal Contraceptives on Sexual Desire and Sexual Fantasies**

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The present study investigated the effects of different forms of hormonal contraceptives on sexual desire in women over the course of one menstrual cycle. Hormonal contraception is widely used in the United States, however as many as 29% of women discontinue use because of unwanted side effects, such as decreased sexual desire. The literature on mechanisms of action of hormonal contraceptives sexual side effects presents inconclusive results. Since the hormones manipulated by HC are also implicated in sexual desire (Clayton, 2003), it is likely that hormonal contraceptives may have a direct effect on the biology of sexual desire. However, studies assessing sexual desire with a self-reported questionnaire have failed to find evidence for this direct relationship. More recently, researchers have identified a variety of aspects of sexual desire, including receptive desire, or desire that is experienced in response to a partner's approach. Previous studies have failed to study this important aspect of sexual desire and focused only on sexual fantasies and sexual thoughts. Different types of sexual desire may be associated with different types of hormones, so a more specific study of the differential effects of androgens, estradiol and progesterone on receptive sexual desire, sexual thoughts and sexual fantasies may be able to better identify the effects of hormonal contraceptives on sexual desire. This study assessed changes in receptive and spontaneous desire, sexual fantasies and sexual thoughts during one menstrual cycle in women using low, localized levels of estradiol (Ring), low but non-localized levels of estradiol (Lo-OCP), and regular levels of estradiol (Hi-OCP). We also measured the physiological sexual response to sexual fantasies during different phases of the menstrual cycle. Results from this study will help elucidate the relationship between different types of hormones and different aspects of sexual desire.