

Pro-life Basics

I am a young woman with an ovarian cyst. My doctor wants me to use the pill to control the pain. Is this all right even if I am not sexually active? I haven't been given any other options. —Stephy

Dear Stephy,

The pill comes in various forms, but all are large doses of synthetic estrogens and progestins. There is nothing intrinsically immoral about ingesting extra hormones, but the pill is normally used for birth control, which the Catholic Church condemns for two reasons. First, artificial contraception is a violation of the order God ordained for sexual activity. Second, hormonal birth control sometimes acts as an abortifacient by preventing the implantation of a human embryo into the womb.

However, in your case, the pill will clearly not be contraceptive or abortifacient. Dr. Anthony Dardano explained this well on my EWTN forum:

The use of the birth control pill as a medical therapeutic agent may be justifiable if certain conditions are met. First and foremost, the primary intent must be a medical therapy for a condition which is treatable by ovulation suppression. Ovarian cysts are a good example of this. By stopping ovulation for a few months, it gives the cysts a chance to regress. Frequently, surgery can thus be avoided

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and pain relief can be dramatic. However, with the lower dose pills of today, ovulation is not always completely stopped. If pregnancy were to occur it might very well be aborted by the action of the pill. Therefore, if a woman is prescribed a pill for medical reasons, she must refrain from sexual intercourse during the therapy and only then would it be morally acceptable. I might add, I don't think long term usage is advisable. If the cysts do not regress in 3-4 months, they probably won't from this therapy alone and other options must be considered.

Thus, the consideration is of the trade-off between potential medical benefits and risks—adding lots of extra hormones to your body is not without side effects. There are situations where the pill may be taken for legitimate medical causes and your case appears to be one. I suggest that in cases where a woman has been prescribed birth control pills for a

medical reason, she should consult a pro-life physician and/or a priest if she is unsure of the necessity or morality of the treatment.

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