



the big bulge

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED? **LIA CRUZ** GIVES YOU REAL ANSWERS
ON WHETHER YOU'RE DUE IN NINE MONTHS
OR JUST HAVING A BIG SCARE

PHOTOGRAPHY LOUIE AGUINALDO

Nina, 23 years old, recounts, "the condom broke and I was panic-stricken. My boyfriend and I went around looking for the Morning After pill, but banned *pala* here." Lots of women, even younger than Nina, have experienced pregnancy scares. And they admit that it's one, if not the most scary, feeling they've ever felt. "It was like my life flashed before my eyes. *Na parang... eto na*, everything stops here. your life changes overnight." Lucky for Nina, it was indeed just a scare. After going to her OB gyne she discovers that she wasn't pregnant.

To get the lowdown on pregnancy and its symptoms, contraceptive methods and their effectivity and proper usage, we consulted OB gynecologists Drs. Rebecca Singson and Erlinda Armovit.

How you get pregnant

Pregnancy only occurs during the female's fertile period. The cycle

is usually 28-35 days long, and the fertile period lasts for only 24-48 hours within that cycle. Usually, it is 14 days after the beginning of her last menstrual period, but it is extremely hard to calculate, especially since factors like stress, emotional problems, changes in lifestyle, or hormonal fluctuations may cause the cycle to shift.

Pregnancy symptoms

Even if you use contraceptives, there is still a chance you might get pregnant. If you have these symptoms, it's a good idea to get yourself checked. "Not all symptoms have to be present for you to be pregnant," Dr. Armovit says.

- A skipped period
- Frequent urination
- Spotting
- Vomiting, retching or nausea
- Breast tenderness
- Backaches or headaches
- Darkening of nipples
- Food cravings

How contraceptives work

Physical barriers, such as condoms, are actual devices that you wear on your person. Oral contraceptives, on the other hand, are ingested into the female system to prevent ovulation. Surgical methods, which are permanent, have to be done by an experienced surgeon, and are not really recommended for college students.

METHOD	FAILURE RATE	SIDE EFFECTS	HOW TO USE	OB REACTS
Condoms	2%	skin irritations, rare allergies to latex	Male puts it on before sex. Must be removed immediately after ejaculation. Otherwise, sperm can leak from sides.	Must be worn perfectly. "They can also break at random, so check for leaks after removal! Do not reuse!" Dr. Armovit cautions.
Withdrawal	4%		Male withdraws penis before he ejaculates, so sperm does not enter vagina.	Least effective. "Withdrawal should be done before ejaculation. But during sex, there could be 'pre-ejaculation' and this fluid also contains sperm," Dr. Armovit says.
Rhythm Method	9%		Sex must only take place during female's safe days, when she is not ovulating. According to Dr. Singson: "To calculate safe days, note shortest cycle. (ex: March 1 was last menstrual period; next was March 28. This is a 27-day cycle.) Subtract 18 from shortest cycle (27-18=9). Next, note longest cycle (ex: Aug 1, then the next one was Sept 2. That's a 32-day cycle.) Subtract 11 from longest cycle (32-11=21). Therefore, unsafe days, or the days when ovulation can occur, are from day 9 to 21 days of menstrual cycle."	"Not a good idea. The menstrual cycle is so unpredictable," Dr. Armovit says.
The Pill	0.3%	Nausea, headaches, dizziness, spotting and bleeding, mood changes, hot flashes, changes in menstrual pattern (skipped periods)	"It depends on the pill," Dr. Armovit says. "In general," Dr. Singson explains, "The pill should first be taken on the first day of menses and taken for at least 21 days, ideally at the same hour every night. If you miss one, you must double the dose next day." Note: Check with a doctor before taking a pill. Each pill requires a different method of compliance and not all pills may be suitable for your body.	According to Dr. Armovit, "The problem is perfect compliance in taking it."

Am I pregnant?

Here are some FAQs on pregnancy

1. Can you still get pregnant even if you use contraceptives?

Yes. "Many contraceptive methods are effective only if used perfectly," Dr. Singson clarifies. Dr. Armovit also adds that sometimes, some contraceptives really just don't work. "Condoms can break at random," she says, "and it has nothing to do with not wearing them properly."

2. In case of emergencies (i.e., rape, condom broke, etc), is there a pill that can be taken in order to prevent pregnancy?

Yes. Termed the "Morning After" pill, this is, however, not available in the Philippines, because our country takes a pro-life stance. Dr. Armovit advises a consultation with a gynecologist instead.

3. How accurate are Early Pregnancy Tests or EPTs?

EPTs are the testing devices you can get in your local drugstore. They usually require a sample of your urine placed in a testing device. "They're usually accurate," Dr. Armovit says. "They should be able to detect a pregnancy seven to ten days after sexual contact." However, she explains: "When you take an EPT after sexual contact, and before your period is expected, a positive result means you are pregnant. A negative result doesn't mean you're not pregnant. It means you have to wait until your period is late, around a week, and then take it again."

4. Can I be pregnant and have no symptoms? Or can I have all the symptoms and not be pregnant?

First question: Yes, you CAN be pregnant and have no symptoms, as long as you skip your period. Second question: Yes. Keep in mind that most symptoms for pregnancy are also symptoms for your monthly period. According to Dr. Armovit, if you feel strongly that you might be pregnant, consult your doctor.

Pregnancy myths

1. A skipped period always means pregnancy.

FALSE. In the teen years, the menstrual cycle is still shaping itself, and a skipped period is normal. Athletes are also prone to skipping periods because of excessive physical activity. Even stress or emotional problems may cause skipped periods.

2. Even without penetration, as long the sperm touches a part of my body near my vaginal opening, I can get pregnant.

FALSE. Actual penetration is needed. Dr. Armovit explains this: "The sperm, once ejaculated into the vagina, uses the mucous inside the vagina as a means of 'transport.' If there is no mucous, the sperm cannot swim up the vaginal canal."

3. I cannot get pregnant if I have unprotected sex during my period.

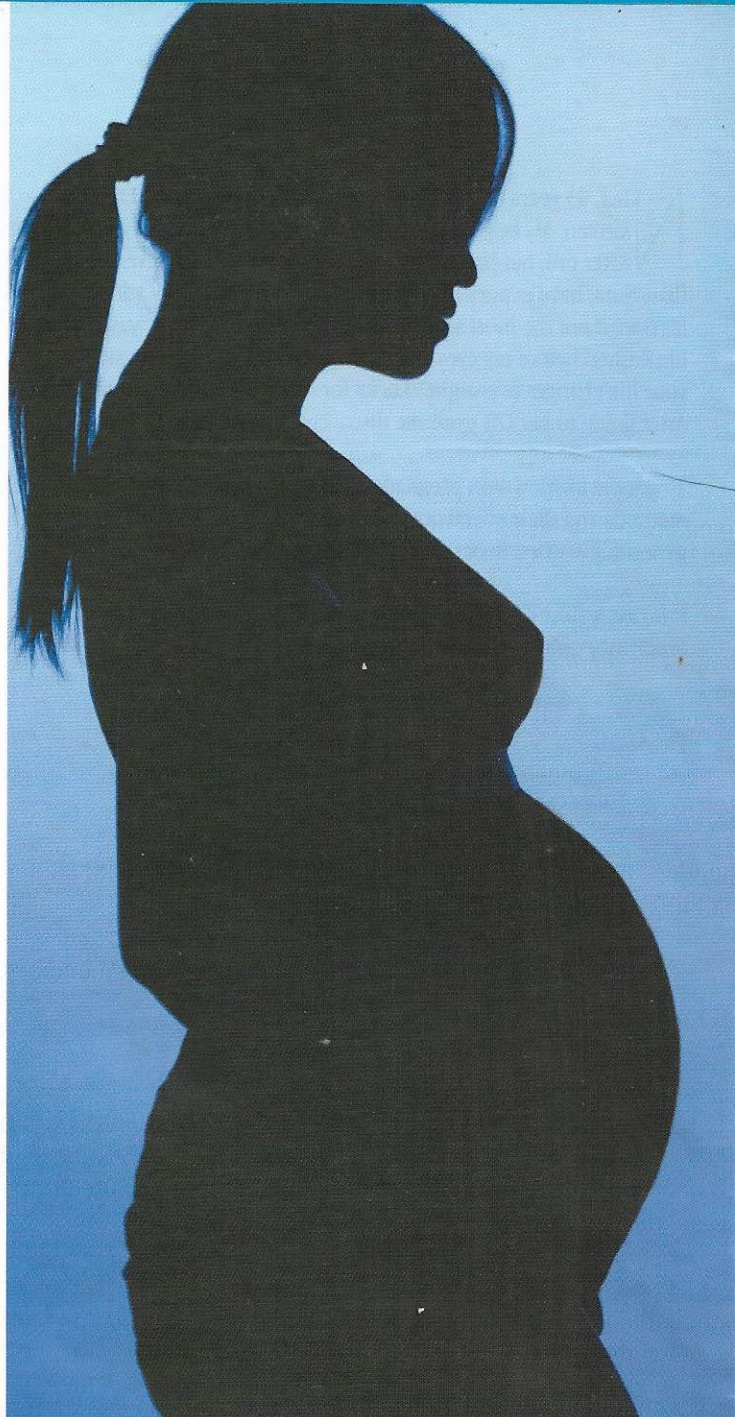
FALSE. Because the menstrual cycle is very sensitive to shifting, you can be ovulating during your period, and there's no way to tell if you are.

4. I can use vaginal douches/feminine washes after sex to kill the sperm that has been ejaculated into my vagina.

FALSE. Theoretically, acidic washes can kill sperm cells, but once ejaculated, the sperm moves incredibly fast through the vaginal canal. Once you break out the douche, there's no way of reaching the sperm.

5. Taking medication, drinking, smoking, taking illegal drugs while I'm taking the Pill will decrease its effectivity.

TRUE. Drugs in general, legal or illegal, can cross-react with the pill. "That's why, before taking a pill, you must always check with a doctor," Dr. Armovit cautions. Drinking can affect your pill's efficiency. Smoking, on the other hand, doesn't alter effectivity, but patients taking the pill are prohibited to smoke, because combined, the two can cause blood clotting.



Want to know more?

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