When birth control fails: Genetic mutation can make the pill less effective

For nearly 60 years, hormonal contraceptives have freed women from their own biology.

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But no form of hormonal birth control—pill, patch, ring, IUD—is 100 percent effective. Why that is, no one knows exactly. Now new research suggests that some of these mysterious failures might actually be due to differences in DNA.

In a study published [March 12] in the journal Obstetrics & Gynecology, researchers at the University of Colorado School of Medicine discovered that about 5 percent of women possess a genetic mutation that makes them produce an extra hormone-dismantling enzyme. This enzyme eats away at the ovulation-suppressing effects of hormonal birth control, lowering its effectiveness. They also found two much more common genes that had smaller but still noticeable effects.

“The biggest takeaway is that we’ve assumed for so long that if a woman taking birth control gets pregnant, then she must have done something wrong,” says Aaron Lazorwitz, an ob-gyn and lead author on the study. “Instead, maybe we need to pay more attention as physicians to other things that might be going on, like genetics, so we can give better, more individualized treatment to women.”

Read full, original post: A genetic mutation might explain why birth control can fail