Coming soon: Male contraceptive pill inches closer

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Researchers are one step closer to developing a male contraceptive pill, a medical conference has heard. Early trials show the pill to be both safe and effective.

The study, led by Professor Stephanie Page of the University of Washington, included 100 men aged between 18 and 50. The men were split into groups of between 17-20 and given three different doses of pills known as dimethandrolone undecanoate, or DMAU. Out of each group, five subjects were given a placebo while another 12-15 were given daily doses of DMAU for 28 days. Some 83 men completed the study.

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The highest dose, 400mg of DMAU, showed *“marked suppression”* of testosterone levels as well as two other hormones required for the production of sperm. The results were compared to longer-term studies and appeared consistent with effective male contraception.

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*"DMAU is a major step forward in the development of a once-daily 'male pill,'"*

Page reportedly told the Endocrine Society's 100th annual meeting in Chicago. *"Many men say they would prefer a daily pill as a reversible contraceptive, rather than long-acting injections or topical gels, which are also in development."*

Page also said that few participants in the study reported having symptoms consistent with testosterone deficiency, although all groups reported weight gain and decreases in healthy cholesterol. *"These promising results are unprecedented in the development of a prototype male pill,"* Page said. *"Longer term studies are currently underway to confirm that DMAU taken every day blocks sperm production."*

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Various male contraceptives have been trialed in the past. In February last year, a gel injection used to block the sperm-carrying tubes, known as vas deferens, was trialed on monkeys. The Vasalgel injection, made by the Parsemus Foundation, has gone forward for human trials.