

As a survey reveals that many women don't feel they're being given enough information about contraception, **ABI JACKSON** looks at the choices available

Are you fully in control?

THERE was a time, somewhere in my mid-teens, when contraception talk was fairly frequent. Trading stories with friends, blushing through sex ed classes at school, assuring my mother that, yes, I was being sensible.

Now in my 30s, the topic hardly ever crops up, and it's ages since I've talked about it with my GP. It came as no surprise when a recent survey revealed that 30% of women hadn't had a conversation with their healthcare professional about contraception in the past year.

The results also suggest women aren't being fully informed of their options.

More than two-thirds (70%) feel they're not receiving enough information on long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) – in fact, 65% admitted they'd never heard the term before.

The survey of 3,000 women was commissioned by Merck Sharp & Dohme Ltd (MSD) who, in partnership with the Family Planning Association (FPA), have launched a campaign called Love, Life & LARCs, aimed at reducing misconceptions and encouraging communication between healthcare professionals and women about contraceptive options.

"The results made disappointing reading," says GP and media medic Dr Dawn Harper. "I think sometimes when a woman asks for 'the pill', she may really mean that she wants a form of contraception other than condoms. That may well be the pill, but it could be that a different form would be more suitable."

There are several different types of contraception, she says, adding: "It's important healthcare professionals make sure women know their options, and that women feel they can talk openly about the issue."

A quick survey of my own, among friends and colleagues, confirms that these conversations, all too often, haven't been happening.

"My doctor won't give out contraception due to religious reasons – his!" says Beth, 41. "He even looks shocked if it's mentioned. It means people have to go to a separate, overcrowded clinic, which is a total pain."

Examples like this may (thankfully) be rare, but cases of people feeling poorly informed are common.

"I think of contraception like the little black dress – what suits one woman just isn't right on another, and what looks a million dollars at 20 isn't necessarily the right choice at 40," says Dr Harper.

THE OPTIONS

Combined pill Pills containing oestrogen and progesterone are taken for 21 days followed by a seven-day break.

Progesterone-only pill This contains no oestrogen and you don't have a seven-day break.

Contraceptive implant A small 40mm flexible rod inserted under the skin of the upper arm. Steadily releases progesterone to stop eggs being released.

Contraceptive injection Works in a similar way to the implant by administering progesterone. Some women experience undesirable side-effects.

IUD (intrauterine device) Releases copper, which prevents sperm from surviving in the womb, and different sizes/copper levels are available.

IUS (intrauterine system) Similar to the IUD but contains no copper and instead releases progesterone.

Patch A sticky 5x5cm patch delivers combined hormones – oestrogen and progesterone – through the skin into your body.

Vaginal ring Releases combined hormones and, if used correctly, is more than 99% effective.

Male condoms Traditional condoms are 98% effective if used correctly.

Female condoms Less well known, female condoms are made of thin polyurethane.

Diaphragm (cap) A round silicone cap covers the cervix to prevent sperm entering.

Natural family planning Couples can study their cycle and use urine test sticks and other factors, such as body temperature, to monitor fertility levels.

Female sterilisation Surgery to block or seal the fallopian tubes, preventing sperm reaching eggs.

Male sterilisation (vasectomy) Involves a minor op to block or seal the tubes that carry sperm from the testicles.

There's no excuse – it's time to get fit

There is no excuse not to exercise and get fit, according to health coach **Joanne Henson**. **LYNETTE PINCHES** tries to come up with some good ones...and fails miserably

I HATE the gym – it's boring, full of sweaty people and swaggering Schwarzenegger wannabes.

Until recently it has been far too hot to even walk around, let alone run. And now it's raining so I'd rather be inside having a cup of tea...or even doing the ironing.

Occasionally I have been known to have a sudden burst of enthusiasm but then something gets in the way and a week later I'm back to my idle ways.

Oh dear, fitness coach Joanne Henson is going to have her work cut out with me.

But the Nottingham-born author of *What's Your Excuse...For Not Getting Fit?* has a comeback for every excuse.

In fact, Joanne, 47, used to be an expert herself when it came to getting out of sport while a pupil at Bluecoat School in Aspley.

"It was all competitive, like netball, hockey and athletics. I was always the last to be picked because I was totally unco-ordinated.

"I couldn't run or catch and I was always last

What's Your Excuse

For Not Getting Fit?

Set aside your excuses and get moving!



JOANNE HENSON



Joanne is hooked on exercise and retrained to become a personal fitness and wellbeing coach.

Joanne Henson knows every excuse in the book – and has got an answer for all of them. (Far left) Joanne's book *What's Your Excuse For Not Getting Fit?*

in a race. I hated exercise and would use any reason to bunk off," she says.

In her late teens and early 20s Joanne didn't exercise at all.

"I found it humiliating. I was so naturally unfit."

It wasn't until she went to Leeds University that she began taking an interest in exercise.

"I was sharing with a student who was mad on fitness, such as running and swimming, but she did it for herself – not a competitive sport. All of sudden I thought about doing exercise for the good of your own health."

Joanne became hooked on swimming and when she returned to Nottingham, she attended aerobics classes at Hoofers in the Victoria Centre nearly every day.

Even though she built up a successful, highly paid career in IT, she yearned for a change of direction so she retrained to become a personal health, fitness and wellbeing coach.

After hearing every excuse in the book from clients for not exercising, it prompted her to turn them into a book.

"A lot of them I used myself 15 years ago," she confesses.

"Instead of going to a step class, I went to the pub and the next day I would be hungover."

These days Joanne is into weight training and is leaner than she's ever been before.

Women, she says, are often worried about getting too muscly but she says the fact that women have more oestrogen and less testosterone than men, means they won't

Excuses Joanne has heard and her comeback

My friend couldn't come with me: Was your friend going to do your workout for you too?

I want to go to the pub instead: Being fit doesn't mean you can't go to the pub, just not every time you're invited. Put a workout in your diary and stick to it.

I want to watch EastEnders: Ever heard of catch-up TV?

I need to look after the kids: How about exercising with your children – cycling, swimming or walking? Make it fun by playing old school games such as skipping, hopscotch and chase.

My iPod needs charging and I don't like to exercise without music: How hard is it going to be to exercise without it? Do you have a partner who'd let you borrow theirs? Could you put it on to charge for a few minutes while you change into your kit?

end up with large bulky muscles.

Yet it is beneficial. Weight training is actually more effective than a cardio workout for losing body fat and resistance training helps to build bone strength and ward off osteoporosis.

The most common excuse is not having the time.

She suggests writing down how you spend your time: getting up, showering, watching TV, a two-hour catch up over coffee with a friend, checking Facebook and Twitter...

"Is that an embarrassed smile I see on your face?" she asks.

"Is there anything you could give up? Everyone is different but it's all about making time and prioritising. If you want to get fit and have to make the time, be creative.

"Could you go for a walk with a friend rather than coffee?"

Joanne, whose book is aimed at women, says busy mums with young children or those caring for elderly parents who are genuinely pushed for time could try high intensity interval training – so instead of running for an hour, do 20 minutes at intervals.

The lamest excuse of all, she says, is 'I got home from work and couldn't get off the sofa'.

Her response: "Really? Not to go to the toilet or fetch a snack? Or is your sofa made of very strong Velcro?"

"Countless studies have found regular exercise reduces feelings of fatigue. Consider how energised you'll feel after a workout. Even ten minutes is going to be better than nothing.

"Perhaps you are planning workouts for the wrong time of day. If you get in from work, hungry and tired, what about exercising at lunchtimes or before work?"

So, there you have it. If you want to get fit, there really is no excuse.

● *What's Your Excuse...For Not Getting Fit?* is available from Amazon, £4.99 paperback and Kindle £2.05.

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Young Joseph's Prince-IPAL role

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