Broadening Contraception Access for Black Women with Fibroids

The “Free the Pill” campaign highlights the lesser known benefits of access to over-the-counter birth control.

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Fibroids are among the most common health challenges Black women face.

Uterine fibroids are noncancerous growths on the uterus that can disrupt menstrual cycles and cause infertility and pregnancy loss.

An estimated 80% of Black women will develop fibroids in their lifetime. Indeed, Black women are two to three times more likely to develop fibroids than white women. What’s more, these fibroids are more likely to develop during adolescence in Black women compared with their non-Black peers. And although hormonal birth control has been proved to improve the quality of life for women living with fibroids, for numerous reasons, this treatment remains out of reach for many Black girls and women.

For instance, Black women say they don’t feel comfortable discussing their sexual health during their primary care visits.

Other reasons for this contraceptive inequity include lack of paid leave to attend appointments, access to transportation and providers and insufficient insurance.

An initiative called “Free the Pill” aims to eliminate these barriers for Black women by advocating for an over-the-counter birth control pill and educating women about the many uses for contraception, reports theGrio.

“The goal is to get a birth control pill over the counter in the United States that is affordable, covered by insurance and available to all ages,” project director Victoria Nichols told theGrio. “There are a host of benefits to birth control,” she said. “Knowing what they are can help to reduce the stigma over-surrounding it.”

In the United States, birth control can be accessed only with a prescription obtained from a licensed physician. Nichols noted that the additional costs of getting to a doctor’s appointment and a pharmacy “fall harder on Black women.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more difficult to access contraception.

“There’s a risk associated with going into the office, especially for those who had a difficult time getting off work,” Nichols told theGrio.

“We know that Black women are the least likely to talk to their providers about birth control and experience stigma and judgment when they do,” she added. “If a pill is over the counter, you don’t have to talk to a provider about what you need and why you need it.”

“Free the Pill” and other organizations are expecting a pharmaceutical company submission to the Food and Drug Administration for an over-the-counter contraceptive pill within the year.

To learn more about fibroids, treatment and common myths, read Real Health’s special issue, “All About Effective Treatments for Uterine Fibroids.”

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