

THE PILL

the 30-second history

The term 'birth control' was first used in publication by Margaret Sanger in the June 1914 issue of her newsletter *The Woman Rebel*. At this time, birth control referred to methods of controlling pregnancy by timing sexual activity with a woman's menstrual cycle or using barrier-type contraceptives such as condoms and diaphragms. Sanger, a nurse, advocated these methods while holding out hope for a 'magic pill' that women could take to prevent pregnancy safely. In her quest for such a pill, Sanger introduced scientist Gregory Pincus to philanthropist Katharine McCormick, who agreed to fund Pincus's research into an oral contraceptive method. Alongside John Rock, Pincus created a medication with progesterone, a naturally occurring hormone that regulates ovulation. Women who take progesterone do not ovulate, and thus cannot become pregnant. After extensive clinical testing, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved use of the pill for women experiencing menstrual problems and, in 1960, extended approval for all women to use it as a contraceptive. By 1963, more than 2.3 million American women were taking the pill; a mere five years later the number of women using it jumped to more than 12 million worldwide even though it had been officially condemned by Pope Paul VI.

3-SECOND THRASH

The pill made it safe and easy for women to take control of their fertility.

3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Oral contraceptive pills remained controversial even after FDA approval. Many states prohibited any sales of the pill, leading to the 1965 Supreme Court case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which determined that states could not prohibit the use of birth control by married couples. The 1972 Supreme Court case *Eisenstadt v. Baird* extended this protection to unmarried women. Both cases used arguments of Constitutional rights to privacy and free association to win their suits.

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3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

MARGARET SANGER
1879–1966

American activist and founder of the American Birth Control League

GREGORY PINCUS
1903–67

American biologist, inventor of the birth control pill

JOHN ROCK
1890–1984

American obstetrician and head of clinical trials for the birth control pill

KATHARINE MCCORMICK
1875–1967

American biologist and benefactor who funded the research into oral contraception

30-SECOND TEXT

Sara Patenaude

Control over fertility revolutionized women's influence over their private and professional lives.