

The male Pill is coming - and it's going to change everything



Men currently only have condoms - but would they take long-term birth control? CREDIT: ALAMY

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By **Aaron Hamlin**, Executive director of the Male Contraception Initiative

Male contraception is coming.

Vasalgel is a non-hormonal male contraceptive owned by the medical research organisation the [Parsemus Foundation](#). It's poised as the first FDA (Food and Drug Administration panel) approved male contraceptive since the condom.

What's more, it's estimated to hit the US market around 2018-2020 - and could change the way we view contraception for ever.

It's easy, too. One injection would last for years. Research tells us that [at least half of men would use it](#).

Vasalgel is essentially a polymer that's injected under local anesthetic into the man's sperm-carrying tubes, accessible through the scrotum — not in his penis or testicles as some authors have erred. It works by blocking sperm and is expected to be reversible through a second injection that dissolves the polymer.

Another advantage of Vasalgel is that while it blocks sperm, other fluid can still pass through. This should reduce any risk of pain due to back pressure, an occasional issue with vasectomies. This could make Vasalgel a best-seller, even among men seeking a permanent contraceptive option.



More than half of men 'can't wait' to take the Pill

Of course, you might well be sceptical about whether men will actually choose the Vasalgel injection. But every year, millions around the globe get vasectomies. That is both more invasive and — unlike Vasalgel — intended to be permanent.

But there are other options.

Gendarussa, another non-hormonal contraceptive, has gone through phase II human trials in Indonesia. The method is hypothesised to work by preventing the sperm's ability to fertilise an egg.

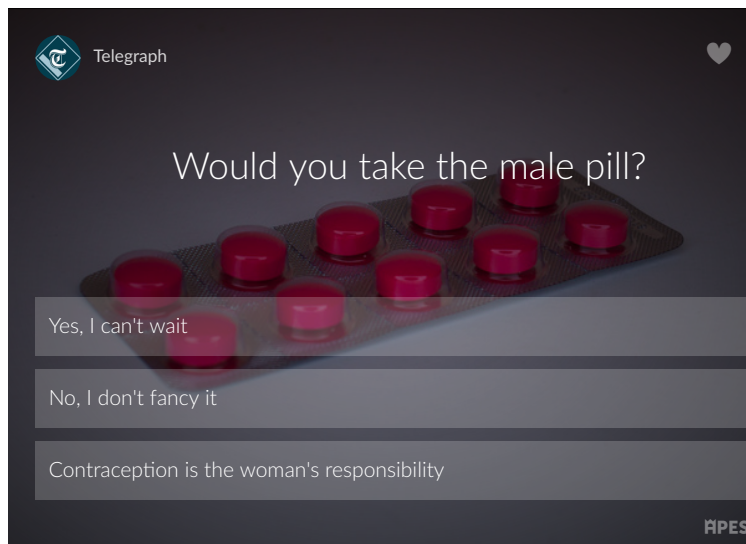
Another method, this one from the US, is an anti-Eppin agent that targets sperm's ability to swim. Both of these non-hormonal methods would involve the man taking a Pill.

These contraceptives are the first in line because they have support from clinical trials. But there are many others, including the 'Clean Sheets Pill' - designed to allow orgasm while inhibiting ejaculation.

It's being developed in London. And because of advances in biotechnology, researchers keep getting new ideas; the bulk of them non-hormonal.

As many women would attest, avoiding hormones would be a luxury - ensuring that contraception was worry and side-effect free.

Male contraception is bound to make a lot of guys happy.



Being able to control the when, if, and with who you become a parent is a big deal. But you can expect their partners to smile, too.

Not every woman finds the more effective contraceptives, such as intrauterine (IUS or IUD) or implant devices acceptable, possibly due to hormones or their unpredictable effect on menstruation.

Others, such as the Pill, may not be the best option because of our human nature to forget things.

Half of women report forgetting at least one Pill during their last cycle, according to a study in the [American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology](#).

This is why the Pill's real-world annual pregnancy rate is nine per cent instead of closer to its much lower 'perfect-use' pregnancy rate of 0.3 per cent.

For women, it will be life-changing to have men help out in the contraceptive department, with a method other than condoms. They could replace or supplementing a woman's existing method—both partners taking something is better than one.

And if the couple, or individual man, decides that Vasalgel is a good option, forgetfulness won't be a worry. There's nothing for the guy to remember.

This is a total game changer for couples, as well as single women and men. It moves the contraceptive burden into shared territory.

This isn't to say that condoms will go away just because of a new male contraceptive.

Condoms didn't go away after the Pill or intrauterine contraceptives became commonplace. As a barrier method, they will still play an important role against sexually transmitted infections.

But condoms alone aren't good enough for pregnancy prevention.

CONTRACEPTION | Condoms



Alamy

What is it? A latex sheath put over the penis to stop sperm from entering the vagina

Effectiveness? 98% if used according to instructions (82% for the average woman)

PROS

- ◆ Also protects against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- ◆ Only needed when you have sex – no advance preparation
- ◆ In most cases there are no medical side-effects

CONS

- ◆ Condoms may slip off or break
- ◆ Some people are allergic to latex, plastic or spermicides
- ◆ The man has to pull out immediately after ejaculating before the penis goes soft

With perfect use, the annual pregnancy rate for the condom is two per cent. But in the real world—where couples don't always use condoms consistently or correctly—the annual pregnancy rate is 18 per cent.

For pregnancy prevention, many couples need other options.

There might be a number of prospective male contraceptives, but it's not plain sailing. Funding is tough. In fact, there's more money dedicated to figuring out how to best to sterilise your family pet than there is to research new male contraceptives.

Frankly, that's just offensive. But there is reason to be hopeful.

The non-profit Packard Foundation has given the folks behind Vasalgel an initial grant. And there are some pockets of government funding out there, albeit limited.

Still, it's not enough, and that needs to change.

To address this shortage, last month the Male Contraception Initiative asked contraceptive researchers to send in funding proposals. Our initial stage will be to crowdfund for the research projects. We'll then use the success from the initial crowdfunding to target large donors, so that bigger projects can be funded.

It's easy to see why so many people would be interested in male contraception given its potential social impact.

Just imagine yourself as a teenager, who's not even finished growing, or as a student with no financial stability. Now throw in parenthood. You get the idea.

New forms of male contraception could change lives, relationships and sex for all of us. What better reason to get behind them?

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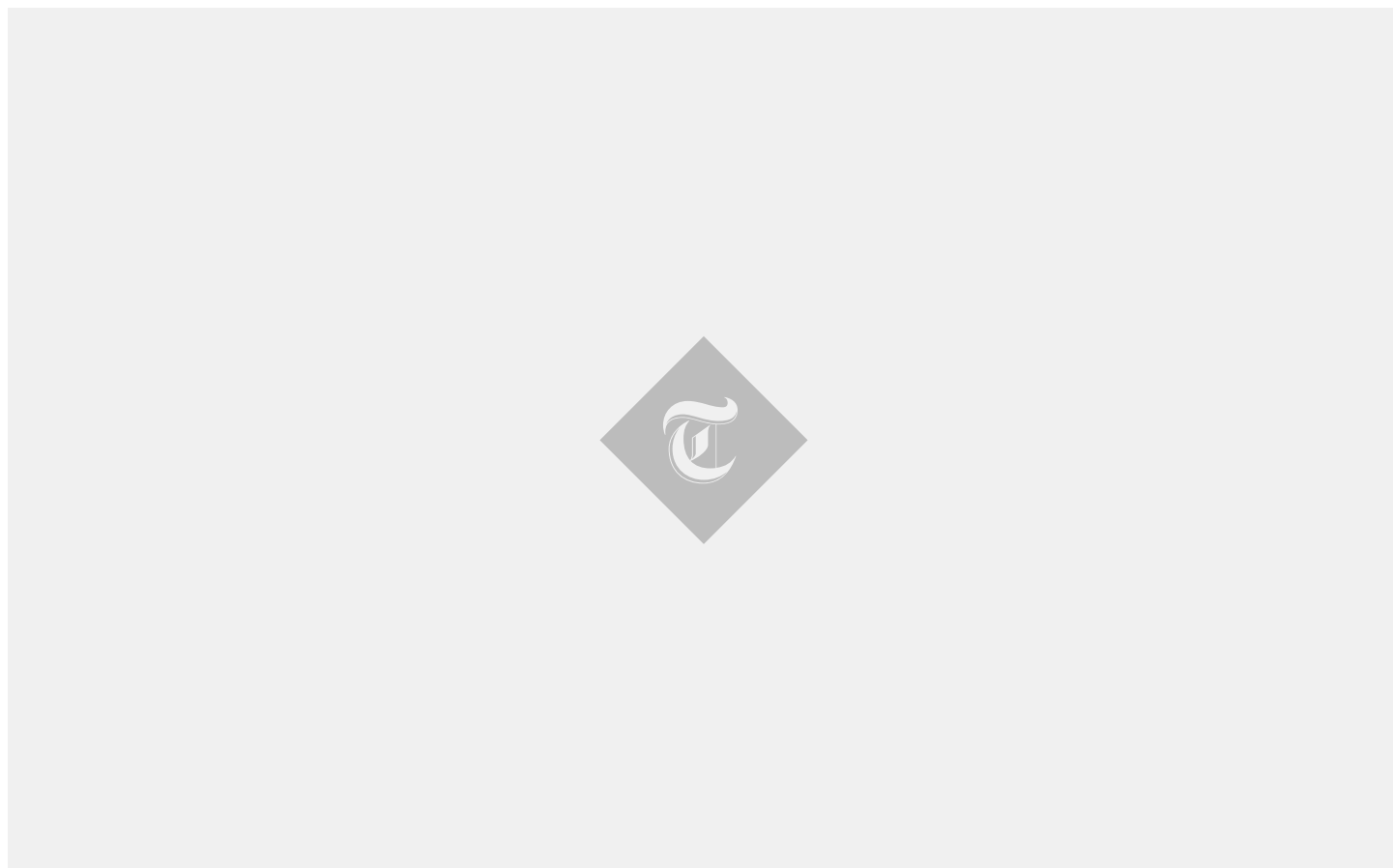
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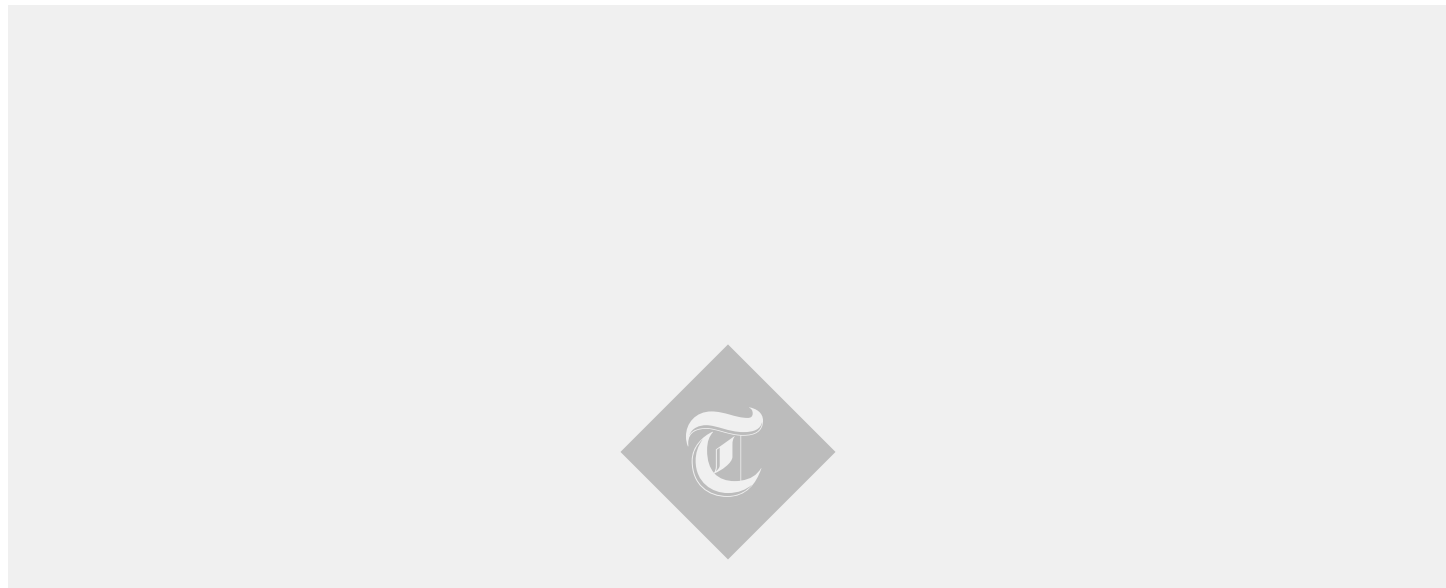
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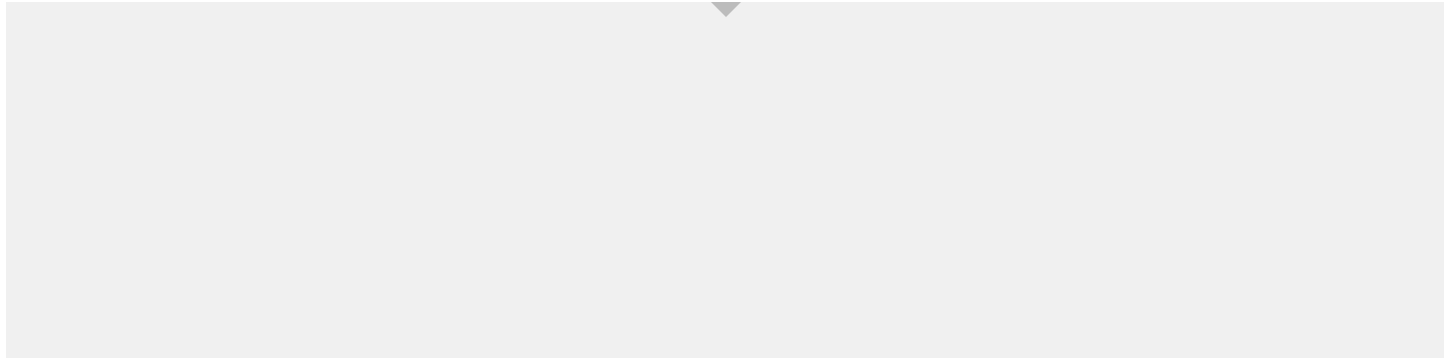
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