If you use contraceptives and suddenly find yourself pregnant, you may wonder why your chosen method of birth control failed to work. The fact is that an overwhelming 53% of unplanned pregnancies occur in women who are using contraceptives. And while you may think that only teenagers and young women experience contraceptive failure, the fact is that the majority of unplanned pregnancies, about three-quarters of them, occur in women over the age of 20, according to an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Why are so many women getting pregnant while using contraceptives?

1. **Failure to follow the instructions** for a given method of birth control exactly as directed is a key cause of contraceptive failure. If you're using birth control pills, taking them at exactly the same time every single day greatly reduces any chance of contraceptive failure and unplanned pregnancy. When using condoms as a contraceptive, it's imperative that they're used properly and in good condition. Women who use a diaphragm or cervical cap need to make sure that the cervix is completely covered before having sexual intercourse. IUD users need to check that the device is in place monthly.
2. Another cause of contraceptive failure occurs when **contraceptives are used inconsistently**. Forgetting to take just one birth control pill significantly raises your risk of becoming pregnant; forgetting to take more than one oral contraceptive in a month means that you should use an alternative contraceptive for the remainder of that menstrual cycle. Barrier methods such as condoms, cervical caps, and diaphragms have to be used during each and every act of sexual intercourse; forgetting just one time means you might become pregnant. Of course, natural family planning only works when practiced consistently and correctly.
3. Condoms that break or have even the smallest tear also often led to unplanned pregnancy. Causes of **condom damage** include improper use, inadequate use of a water-based lubricant, using condoms past the expiration date, improper storage. Jewelry, fingernails, and other objects may create tiny tears in condoms that render them ineffective. If condoms are your choice in contraception, make sure to use a vaginal spermicide to decrease your risk of unplanned pregnancy should condom damage occur.
4. Contraceptive failure may also happen in women **taking certain drugs or herbs**. If you're using oral contraceptives check with your doctor and / or pharmacist for any possible drug / herb interactions that may reduce the effectiveness of your birth control pill.
5. Believing that you are not in your **fertile period** is a huge mistake that can potentially lead to an unplanned pregnancy. There is no "safe time" of the month, according to researchers from the National Institute of Environmental Health, where they have found that the possibility of pregnancy may occur on almost any day of the month including during menstruation.

Remember, birth control pills and other methods of contraception do not offer any protection against STDs -- only the consistent and proper use of condoms can offer you that protection. Unless you are in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship, the use of a condom is recommended during each and every act of sexual intercourse, as well as during oral sex, to protect yourself.