

Fertility Care for young women

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dedicated to helping women appreciate their fertility

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HOW AN 8-YEAR-OLD BECAME A NAPROTECHNOLOGY SURGEON

Naomi Whittaker, MD

SITTING IN THIS CHAIR, I am able to pause and reflect on what a miracle it is for me to be training here at the Pope Paul VI Institute. I wouldn't be who I am and where I am today without God, my husband Brian, and my children. My life hasn't been easy and nothing was handed to me while growing up. I made a lot of mistakes, but eventually found my way to what I am called to be. Going into medical school, I knew the one field of medicine I never wanted to go into was OB-GYN, and I had never even heard of NaProTechnology. Thankfully, God opened many doors for me to reveal a fuller life than the one I was on track to lead.

Becoming a NaProTechnology surgeon might be compared to a marathon. At times it's grueling, mentally and physically exhausting, I've hit "the wall" many times and wanted to quit. It would usually happen to me at 1:00 am (about 19 hours into my 28 hour shift in residency). But, unlike running a marathon of 26.2 miles, I've been running this path to become a NaProTechnology surgeon for 23 years.

I do have one advantage — I am blessed to have married my high school sweetheart, Brian. He has been my rock and my helping hand to pull me toward the finish line when I wanted to give up. I would not have succeeded if we weren't running this marathon together.

Before I met my husband, I was inspired to dream big dreams. As the first child of Polish political refugees born



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within months of them landing on American soil, I quickly learned that if I wanted something in life I would need to work hard to get it. My parents told me stories of their experiences under Communism, like the death of my grandmother after a C-section, waiting in long lines for food, living under martial law, being drafted into the Communist military, John Paul II, the Solidarity movement, and how blessed I am to be one of the few people in the world to enjoy the freedom of opportunity in America. I made a decision to not take my gift of freedom for granted.

At the age of eight, I started dreaming of becoming a physician. I clearly remember looking up to our family physician. His care

made a huge impact on the physical and the emotional well being of our family. I developed a great respect for the profession of physician. I saw it as a vocation to heal mind, body and soul.

As soon as I could, I pursued my calling to become a physician and studied very hard in school. For a time, I thought that I was called to enlist in the military to both give back to the country whose freedoms I held dear, as well as help start my medical career.

This turned out to be one of those "you make plans and God laughs" moments because the Army medically disqualified me for something minor. I fought my disqualification for over a year, trying to hold fast to what I had envisioned. Instead of beginning my own military career, my high school sweetheart (who was also 19 years old at the time) proposed to me soon before he left for his Army Basic Training. Knowing what I know today, the military is not where I am called to

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be. This was the first of many times when the doors were shut and God opened the right door.

Try as we might to follow God's will for us, Brian and I often needed to be steered back on track. For instance, we began our marriage on birth control after receiving a poorly worded lecture on Natural Family Planning during our marriage prep and seeing no other viable options. My heart was completely closed off to having children in the first years of our marriage because of fear and career. I was misinformed, and, frankly, a hypocrite. I was contradicting my own pro-life activism in college, but I didn't realize it until I reached medical school.

As the end of undergrad neared, I started applying to medical school. I never really considered applying anywhere other than Indiana University because I had always wanted to be near family. But pre-med anxiety got the best of me and I started Googling for backup schools on the internet. I somehow stumbled upon Creighton University out of 179 medical schools in the U.S. I applied to multiple med schools just to be safe, but never really thought I would move across the country.

It wasn't long before I heard back from the med schools I applied to. They all mailed me a polite, but painful, denial or waitlist letter — all except Creighton. This was my next moment when all doors were shut to me and God opened the right door. Then just before undergrad ended, my life and heart took a dramatic turn.

My husband left to fight in the Afghanistan war and my parents filed for divorce. A couple months later, I left everyone I knew behind to travel across the country for medical school at Creighton University.

The first year of medical school was a challenge. It was like undergrad lectures on steroids — imagine packing two years of undergraduate college classes into your brain in 6 months. I remember hours upon hours memorizing the complicated medical information on hundreds of densely written slides each day. My support system I had always relied on was essentially gone. So, understandably it wasn't long before I was broken down and hit rock bottom.

A recent viral video featuring Dr. Rick Rigsby called "Lessons from a Third Grade Drop Out" explained that when you hit rock bottom you can create a strong foundation. Thankfully,

I plan to use this knowledge to be on the front lines of the war on women where abortion and contraception have been touted as mandatory for success and sexual freedom, when in fact the opposite is true.

that is what happened and I relied on my faith at that time. Now that I had been broken down, God could finally shape me into what I was meant to be.

With His help, my faith grew in many ways and my eyes began to see how contraception went against everything I loved and believed in. During mass one Sunday the priest was God's instrument and opened my heart to children in my marriage.

Next, I went to a lecture from Pope Paul VI Institute. I was surprised, confused, but interested in what was presented. As a Catholic, I wondered why I hadn't ever heard of any practical or effective form of Natural Family Planning or their unique medical and surgical approaches to infertility. I was shocked and surprised the research behind it was extensive and the science spoke to my heart.

It took months, but I decided to take a leap of faith and look into what they had to offer. I scheduled a Creighton Model System intro session at The Institute when Brian got back from Afghanistan. We were skeptical, but our time experiencing the life and death realities of war helped us gain a new perspective and grow in our faith. I began using the Creighton Model System and loved knowing so much about my fertility and health on any given day.

While overseas my husband saw the soft smiles of joy on the hardened faces of his war-worn friends as they spoke to their children. He saw unequivocal, genuine love from a father that cut through the sternest faces. Soon after he came back, we decided to open up to life in our family, which gave us another transformative gift: our son, John Paul. After his birth, I gained an appreciation of the beauty and joys of motherhood that I couldn't have imagined before. My experiences in my personal life and in medical school made me consider the one specialty I thought I never ever would do.

As a medical student, not only did I see poor medical treatment of female conditions, I also saw a lack of caring for mother and unborn child. There was one experience in particular which was pivotal.

I was in a patient room as I watched as the doctor told the patient that her baby had no heartbeat on her ultrasound that day. The pregnant mother instantly broke down. She had experienced two early previous miscarriages and the news hit

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ACNE, NOT A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

Teresa Kenney, WHNP

THE ISSUE OF ACNE IS NEAR AND DEAR TO MY HEART. I had acne as a teenager and it was your typical annoying pimples that would come and go. In college I developed more severe adult acne. It was so bad that I hated to look at my own face. I would get up early to shower before all the other girls just so no one would see me without my makeup, and I distinctly remember avoiding all mirrors, because I hated to see the acne on my face.

I remember coming home for Christmas and my brother saying, "What happen to your face, it looks like you got shot with a rifle" (Ahh brothers!). My mom took me to a dermatologist and I got treatment, very aggressive treatment with a drug called Accutane. It cured my acne, and I was forever grateful.

There is a lot to consider when treating Acne and a lot of different treatment options. As a women's health nurse practitioner it is a common disease I treat, and because of my own personal experience I try to do everything I can to get rid of it for good!

Most acne has a hormonal component to it, that is why it doesn't usually show up until after puberty. Some acne persists to be hormonally-driven into adulthood. Many women who suffer from acne will notice that their acne is worse at different times in the menstrual cycle. Male like hormones called androgens will increase the oil on the skin and increase the likelihood of breakouts.

There are also particular women's health issues that increase acne, one in particular is polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). This syndrome causes an overall all increase in androgens and so acne can be a common symptom of this disease. Many women find out they have PCOS because it also leads to irregular menstrual cycles which brings them into see a doctor.

There are other triggers in causing acne, including the environment, your overall health, and the food that you eat. Your daily routines can affect the skin as well, cleansing routine, products you put on your face, even other chemicals and products that you might be sensitive to. And let's not forget **STRESS**. Stress is a big factor for many of us, and yes, stress can increase the likelihood of breakouts of acne.

So what's a girl to do about acne?

First, consider your menstrual cycle and how it may be related to acne. Do you see patterns of acne with certain times of your cycle? It really helps to begin with fertility

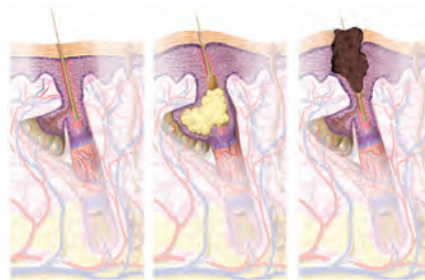
awareness or charting of the cycle. Women often do not know how to interpret their own body's signs when it comes to fertility. Learning how to chart from a trained practitioner can be extremely helpful. See fertilitycare.org for more information on charting your cycle.

Second, look at your cleansing routine. Do you even have a routine? If not, it can be helpful to put one in place if you are prone to breaking out. Start with daily washing of your face with a mild cleanser. Three that I like are Biore baking soda cleanser, Cetaphil daily wash, and Neutrogena acne prone wash. Then consider a topical spot treatment to attack the most acne prone spots. Again, I like Neutrogena spot treatment, and I also like Proactiv sulfur mask for a spot treatment that you leave on overnight. If you keep up a good routine you are less likely to have breakouts.

Third, consider what you eat. There is some research to support that eating less dairy and less sugar will lead to less breakouts. These food groups tend to be inflammatory, and I have seen fewer breakouts when patients eliminate sugar and dairy the week before their period. Decrease your overall junk food, eat lots of veggies, some fruits, and drink water, **NOT** pop and juice!

Fourth, if you have tried all this and still have bad acne, go to a dermatologist, or start with a primary provider like me. We can offer much more in terms of topical treatments, and if you have hormone related acne there is a medication called spironolactone that is often effective. In some cases, where acne is very severe, Accutane can be a good option, you do have to weigh all the risks and benefits, but it does offer a permanent cure in most cases which is very satisfying for acne patients. Accutane is very dangerous to a baby in the womb, so patients need to take an abstinence pledge when taking this medication.

All in all, there are great options for helping women with acne. What I hate to see is when someone is suffering and not getting the proper treatment. It can be embarrassing to ask about treatment for acne, I know, but remember that people who are providing care like me, have likely experienced it ourselves and just want to see you get better, and feel better about yourself. So, do not hesitate and ask about acne and treatment the next time you are at your doctor. †



NORMAL SKIN PORE WHITEHEAD BLACKHEAD

Hair follicle anatomy demonstrating a healthy hair follicle (pictured left), a whitehead or closed comedo (middle picture), and a blackhead or open comedo (pictured right)¹

1. Blausen.com staff (2014). "Medical gallery of Blausen Medical 2014". *Wiki-Journal of Medicine* 1 (2). DOI:10.15347/wjrm/2014.010. ISSN 2002-4436.

RESOURCES

drhilgers.com
 fertilitycare.org
 creightonmodel.com
 naprotechnology.com
 popepaulvi.com



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her hard as tears streamed down her face.

After our medical team stepped into the hallway, the young OB-GYN physician scoffed, “She was only 11 weeks.” She looked as though she wanted to roll her eyes at the situation that had just unfolded. To me, it appeared as though she did not respect the life of this unborn child and she completely disregarded the mourning mother’s emotions.

I realized I could not just turn away. I realized that this was the final piece in the puzzle that Christ had put together for me. I felt an obligation to these women and unborn children to give them the care I saw during my experiences with the different NaProTechnology doctors with the Pope Paul VI Institute.

So I dove head first. I overcame my fears of failure and criticism, and I applied for OB-GYN residency. I ended up in Peoria, Illinois at the Order of Saint Francis Hospital.

I witnessed the unethical treatment of infertility patients as the IVF doctor based his treatments on what insurance someone had or how much they could pay. He used the same high dose hormone protocol on everyone, eventually funneling them to IVF. He repeatedly would say he “hates children,” mocked the idea of “test tube babies,” and how he couldn’t comprehend why anyone would want children. I saw triplets miscarried at 22 weeks after IVF, other IVF triplets with rare genetic disorders, terrible surgical skills and complications by

the IVF physician, and heard stories of infertile women losing hundreds of thousands of dollars to IVF who were left childless and without any money left to adopt.

So, needless to say, I am so tremendously grateful for the opportunity I have thanks to my parents fleeing Communism to reach freedom of opportunity, and my husband’s deployment to Afghanistan which led to a conversion away from contraception and the freedom of knowledge that Dr. Hilgers worked so hard to uncover.

I plan to use this knowledge to be on the front lines of the war on women where abortion and contraception have been touted as mandatory for success and sexual freedom, when in fact the opposite is true. I know because I have experienced it myself.

My conversion brought joy to my personal life and turned my career into a vocation to transform lives of women and families. Through my work, I plan to bring the joys of motherhood through pregnancy or better health and support for adoption. The children I had in medical school and residency helped me become a more devout Catholic and NaProTechnology-trained infertility surgeon.

I cannot imagine a better job in the world. And I cannot imagine doing it any other way now. I cannot believe the incredible graces God gave me to get to this point. With God, I truly believe we can take on the next battle to defeat IVF and free women with NaProTechnology. †

AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE *War on Women*

A collection of 17 true stories from the case histories
 of the National Center for Women's Health

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