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QUESTION: Is the practice of contraception allowed in Islam? If so, then under what circumstances?

ANSWER: Contraception is permissible on a limited scale for valid reasons accepted by Sharī'ah. Outwardly, if we look at the various narrations of our beloved Prophet (SAW), it will seem as though the use of contraception should not be permissible at all. For example, in a narration of Abu Dawūd, it is mentioned that the Prophet (SAW) encouraging his noble companions mentioned that marry loving, affectionate and fertile woman because I will vie with your large numbers on the Day of Judgment. However, under certain conditions Sharī'ah has given permission to use reversible methods of contraception, viz.

1. If another pregnancy would adversely affect the care and upbringing of the existing child i.e. if the couple want to use contraceptives to allow a reasonable time period between the birth of any two children.
2. If it is proven that another pregnancy would adversely affect the health of the mother or it might put her life at risk
3. If there is a risk of the baby being born with a genetic disease e.g. Down's syndrome.
4. If the husband lives in a morally corrupt society and he fears that his offspring will be wayward then according to some Ulamā it will be permissible to use contraceptives
5. If the wife is immoral and disobedient to her husband and he wishes to divorce her because of her bad character

However, if the couple have any other valid excuse accepted by Sharī'ah and sanctioned by a qualified and experienced Muslim doctor, then too, it will be permissible to use contraceptives.

In the following instances it will not be permissible to use contraceptives at all, viz.

1. If the husband fears that he will not be able to see to the needs of his children due to poverty (this is contrary to the Aāyah of the Qur'ān where in Allāh mentions that the responsibility of the sustenance of every living creature lies with Allāh ('Al-Hūd Ayah 6).
2. If the couple's intention is to have a small family consisting of 2 to 3 members (this is contrary to the ḥadīth mentioned in the beginning).
3. If the woman is pursuing a career and she fears that a pregnancy would hinder her progress.
4. If the woman fears that a pregnancy would spoil her figure.
5. If the woman is mentally unstable or she is unable to see to the needs of her children (in such a case, her husband should see to the upbringing of the children, and if he is unable to do so, then any other member of the immediate family should tend to their needs).
6. If the couple does not want female offspring, or if she is afraid of pregnancy, labor pains, shouldering the responsibility of motherhood e.g. changing nappies etc.

If there is any other reason that remotely resembles any of these reasons, then the exact same ruling will apply i.e. it will not be permissible to use contraceptives or practice Coitus Interruptus.

And Allāh alone knows best