Pregnancy Test - A Thin Blue Line The History of the Pregnancy Test

Introduction

Am I pregnant?

The answer to this age-old question once demanded a combination of guesswork, intuition, and time. In 1978, however, the long wait to know for sure became a thing of the past. Trumpeted by advertisements as “a private little revolution,” the first home pregnancy tests started appearing on drug store shelves that year. A quarter of a century later, innovations promise to make even the telltale thin blue line obsolete. This web site looks at the history of the home pregnancy test—one of the most ubiquitous home healthcare products in America—and examines its place in our culture.

The home pregnancy test works by identifying the presence of the “pregnancy hormone,” human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG), in urine. Research that led to a sensitive, accurate test for hCG was done by scientists in the Reproductive Research Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at NIH.

Advertisement for Answer Ladies' Home Journal, December 1978.

hCG Research at NIH