



# *The Pill and Breast Cancer*

*by Chris Kahlenborn, MD*

## ***1) How could the Pill cause breast cancer?***

Two of the most important types of hormones that control reproduction are estrogens and progestins. Birth control pills are made from synthetic estrogens and/or progestins. Experiments have shown that these hormones cause women's breast cells to divide more rapidly.<sup>1</sup> Cells that divide more rapidly are more prone to develop into cancer cells.

## ***2) What is the evidence that the Pill and breast cancer are connected?***

A comprehensive meta-analysis<sup>2</sup> published in the *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* in October 2006 found that 21 out of 23 retrospective studies done since 1980 showed that women who took oral contraceptives prior to the birth of their first child sustained a 44% average increased risk of developing pre-menopausal breast cancer (see research chart inside). This risk rose to 52% for women who took the Pill for at least four years prior to the birth of their first child.

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**3) How serious of a problem is breast cancer?**

Breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer death in the United States in women ages 20-59. About one in eight women will develop breast cancer at some time in her life. In the U.S. about 211,000 women are diagnosed annually, and over 40,000 die from this disease.<sup>2</sup> More than one in five women who are diagnosed with breast cancer (i.e., 47,000 women annually) will develop it before menopause. This risk is increased even higher when combined with other breast cancer risk factors such as induced abortion, hormone treatment (such as estrogen supplementation), family history of breast cancer, and other factors.

**4) Do some contraceptives cause more risk than others?**

Yes. Research studies show that breast cancer risk is *almost tripled* for women who used Depo-Provera for 2 years or more before age 25.<sup>4</sup>

**5) Are other types of cancer affected by oral contraceptive pills?**

Oral contraceptives decrease the risk of ovarian and uterine cancer, while they increase the risk of cervical and breast cancer.<sup>5</sup> Since breast cancer is far more prevalent than the other three types of gynecological cancers, the Pill's overall effect is detrimental to women.

**6) How can I protect myself?**

Many of the known risk factors for breast cancer can be avoided: hormone exposure (including hormonal contraceptives), induced abortion, heavy alcohol use, obesity, and radiation exposure. In addition,

there is a significant reduction of risk with each child a woman bears. Every month of breastfeeding reduces breast cancer risk, as does bearing a child at a younger age. Some medications (e.g., raloxifene),

which are taken after menopause to help strengthen bones, have been shown to markedly reduce the risk of post-menopausal breast cancer and should be considered by all women at high risk.<sup>6</sup>

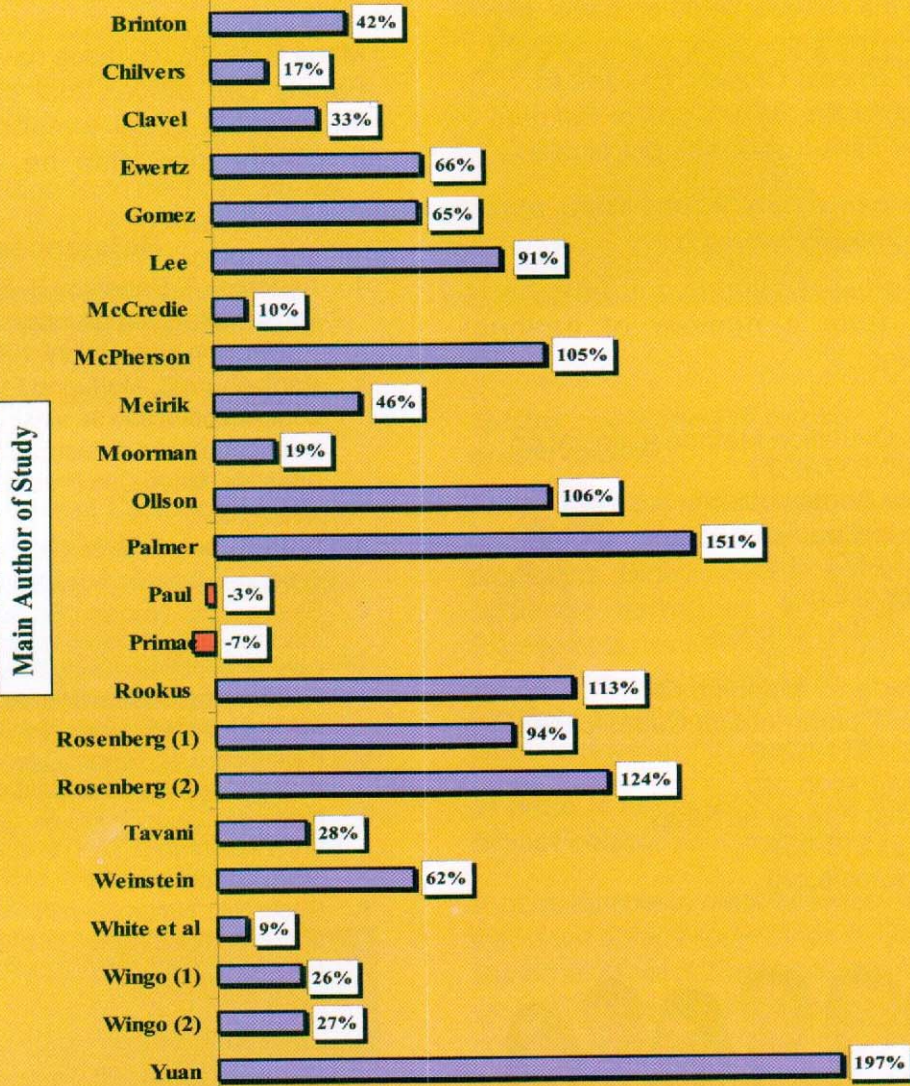


**7) If hormonal contraceptives are so dangerous, what options do couples have?**

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods are available and do not require chemicals or surgery and cause no increase in breast cancer risk. Not to be confused with the "rhythm method," NFP is based primarily on observations of a woman's cervical mucus. One of the largest research studies of NFP (involving 19,843 women and performed in India by the World Health Organization) showed a pregnancy rate of 0.2 pregnancies per 100 women yearly.<sup>7</sup>

Natural Family Planning methods have been used to diagnose and treat a variety of female reproductive disorders including infertility. Various medical problems (e.g., excessive menstrual cramping and bleeding), which are sometimes treated with contraceptive hormones, can be treated far more safely with less toxic means (e.g., magnesium/calcium supplements and/or ibuprofen products).

**Increased Risk of Breast Cancer in Studies of Pre-menopausal Women Who Took Oral Contraceptives Prior to Their First-Term Pregnancy\***



\*Data taken from *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* (Kahlenborn et al. 10/06)  
 Included studies were published between 1980-2002. The individual studies show the change from parous non-oral contraceptive users.

**8) How can I find out more about breast cancer risk from the Pill?**

Anyone may download the entire Mayo Clinic meta-analysis article by going to: [www.MayoClinicProceedings.com](http://www.MayoClinicProceedings.com) and accessing the October 2006 archives. In addition, eleven of the seventeen chapters in the book **Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill** deal with cancer risks from birth control pills.

**9) Where can I find information about Natural Family Planning?**

Natural Family Planning information is available from a number of national organizations:

Billings Ovulation Method Association  
(888) 637-6371  
[www.Boma-usa.org](http://www.Boma-usa.org)

Couple to Couple League  
(513) 471-2000  
[www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org)

Family of the Americas  
(800) 443-3395  
[www.familyplanning.net](http://www.familyplanning.net)

National Conference of Catholic Bishops  
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Many Catholic dioceses have NFP offices or Family Life offices that can supply NFP information. Local parishes and Catholic hospitals may also be good sources.

**References**

1. Anderson T, Battersby S, et al. Oral contraceptive use influences resting breast proliferation. *Hum Pathol.* 1989; 20:1139-1144.
2. Kahlenborn C, Modugno FM et al. Oral contraceptive use as a risk factor for premenopausal breast cancer: a meta-analysis. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2006; 81(10): 1290-1302.
3. Breast Cancer Facts and Figures 2003-2004. American Cancer Society. ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org))
4. Skegg DCG, Noonan EA, et al. Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate and breast cancer [A pooled analysis of the World Health Organization and New Zealand studies]. *JAMA.* 1995:799-804.
5. Kahlenborn, C. *Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill.* 2000.
6. National Cancer Institute. Study of tamoxifen and raloxifene (STAR) trial. April 26, 2006. ([www.cancer.gov/star](http://www.cancer.gov/star))
7. Ryder RE. "Natural Family Planning": Effective birth control supported by the Catholic Church. *Brit Med J.* 1993; 307: 723-726.

Dr. Chris Kahlenborn practices Internal Medicine in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, and is the current president of the Polycarp Research Institute ([www.polycarp.org](http://www.polycarp.org)). He is the author of **Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill**, on

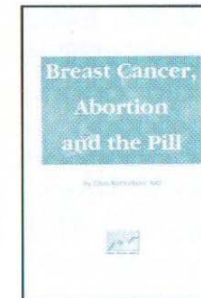
which this pamphlet is partially based. This book (**BBCL**) is available from One More Soul at (800) 307-7685 for a suggested donation of \$5.95 for the soft cover edition and \$13.95 for the hardback.

**Other resources from Dr. Kahlenborn:**



**Breast Cancer Risk from Abortion PBCA** (pamphlet) **\$0.35**

Information from the book *Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill*, presented in a short and highly persuasive format. We have received letters and phone calls about babies saved from abortion when their mothers read this pamphlet.



**Breast Cancer: Abortion and the Pill KBCL** (booklet) **\$1.00**

This booklet presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations from Chapter 17 of the book *Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth*

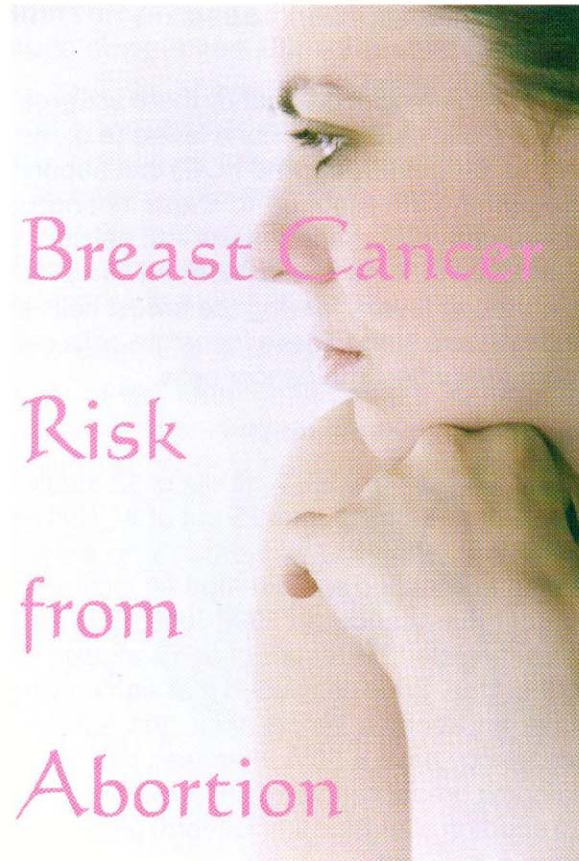
*Control Pill*. A great resource for explaining just how dangerous abortion and contraceptive pills are.

These pamphlets may be copied without alteration, for non-commercial use.

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**One More Soul**  
1846 North Main Street  
Dayton, Ohio 45405-3832



Breast Cancer

Risk

from

Abortion

by Chris Kahlenborn, MD

### ***How could abortion cause breast cancer?***

At the beginning of pregnancy there are great increases in certain hormone levels (e.g., estrogen, progesterone, and hCG) that support pregnancy. In response to these changes, breast cells divide and mature into cells able to produce milk. Abortion causes an abrupt fall in hormone levels, leaving the breast cells in an immature state. These immature cells can more easily become cancer cells.

### ***Has this been proven?***

Yes. As of January 1999, 11 out of 12 studies in the United States, and 25 out of 31 studies worldwide, showed that women who experienced an induced abortion had an increased risk of breast cancer. In 1996 Joel Brind, PhD [1], assembled the results of all the studies up to that time. Brind concluded that women who have an abortion before their first full-term pregnancy have a 50% increased risk of developing breast cancer while those who have an abortion after their first full-term pregnancy have a 30% increased risk.

### ***What does it mean to have "a 50% increased risk of developing breast cancer?"***

A 50% increased risk means a 50% higher risk than someone would have otherwise. For example, if a person already had a 10% risk of developing breast cancer, then a 50% increase would bring the risk up to 15%.

### ***How serious a problem is breast cancer?***

Breast cancer is the worldwide leading cancer in women and is the most common cause of cancer death for U.S. women age 20 to 59.

In the U.S. every year about 211,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 40,000 women die from this disease [2]. This means that about one U.S. woman out of eight will develop breast cancer at some time in her life and about one fourth of such women will die from this disease. Induced abortion, especially at a young age, markedly increases a woman's risk for developing breast cancer. This risk is increased even further by other breast cancer risk factors such as synthetic hormones (including hormonal contraceptives like the birth control pill, Norplant and Depo-Provera), family history of breast cancer, and others.

The U.S. has one of the highest rates of induced abortion and hormonal contraceptive use in the world, especially for young women. The breast cancer rate in the U.S. is rising, and will likely rise even higher once the latent period (the time it takes for cancer to develop) for these women has passed.

Calculations based on available studies indicate that induced abortion may result in over 46,800 additional cases of breast cancer in the U.S. annually.

### ***Are some groups of women in greater danger?***

Yes. The research shows that induced abortion increases the risk of breast cancer more for some groups of women than for others. Black women, for example, have higher rates of breast cancer and tend to develop more aggressive cancers. There is also a greater risk in women who have had abortions if they were under age 18 at the time, if they do not have any more children after aborting, or if they have a family history of breast cancer.

### **Why would black women have more breast cancer?**

Breast cancer in the U.S. is more prevalent in young black women than in white women of equivalent age, and is the second leading cause of cancer death (after lung cancer) among black women. This may be a consequence of more common hormonal contraceptive use and/or a greater frequency of abortion among young black women. Black women who develop breast cancer generally have more aggressive cancers resulting in a shortened life expectancy.

### **What is the risk for young women?**

Janet Daling noted in 1994 [3] that women younger than 18 who had an abortion experienced a 150% increased risk of developing breast cancer. This became an 800% increased risk if they had their abortions between the 9th and 24th week of pregnancy.

### **What if there has been breast cancer in my family?**

Women who have a family history of breast cancer and choose to have an abortion are at very high risk of developing breast cancer. Andrieu et al (1994) [4] found that women who had a family history of breast cancer and had two or more induced abortions had a 600% increased risk of breast cancer as compared to the rest of the population. Daling et al (1994) [3] noted that women who had an abortion prior to age 18 and had a positive family history of breast cancer had an *infinitely* increased risk of developing breast cancer compared to young women who had a family history of breast cancer and had not had an abortion. She also noted that women who were 30 or older at the time of their abortion and had breast cancer in their family history had a 270% increased risk.

### **But isn't pregnancy and childbirth more dangerous than abortion?**

No. The risk of breast cancer is increased by abortion; suicide risk is much higher after an abortion; and risk of ovarian cancer is decreased after a full-term pregnancy. Because of changes in these three risk factors, abortion is many times more hazardous in the long-run than carrying a child to term.

### **How can I protect myself?**

Many of the known risk factors for breast cancer can be avoided: hormone exposure (including hormonal contraceptives), induced abortion, heavy alcohol use, obesity, and radiation exposure. In addition, there is a significant reduction of risk with each child a woman bears. Every month of breastfeeding reduces breast cancer risk, as does bearing a child at a younger age. Vitamin A (which should not be taken in high doses by women who could become pregnant) and some commercial medications may offer some protection. Any woman, especially if she has one or more of the known risk factors, should consult a physician regularly and perform frequent self-breast exams.

### **If abortion and chemical contraceptives are so dangerous, what options do couples have?**

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods are available which use no chemicals or surgery and cause no increase in breast cancer risk. Not to be confused with the "rhythm method," NFP is based on observations of a woman's cervical mucus and (for some methods) other symptoms as well. One of the largest research studies of NFP (involving 19,843 women and performed in India by the World Health Organization) showed a pregnancy rate of 0.2 pregnancies per 100 women yearly [5].

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Natural Family Planning methods have been used to diagnose and treat a variety of female reproductive system disorders including infertility. Various medical problems (e.g., excessive menstrual cramping and bleeding) can be treated far more safely with less toxic means (e.g., magnesium/calcium supplements and/or ibuprofen products).

### If a woman develops breast cancer during pregnancy, should she abort the baby?

Definitely not. A woman diagnosed with breast cancer while pregnant has a significantly longer life expectancy if she gives birth rather than aborting. Clarck and Chua (1989) [6] found that of the women in their study who had breast cancer while pregnant and had an abortion, *none were alive* after 11 years, while 20% of the women who had breast cancer and chose to deliver their babies were alive at 20 years.

### How can I find out more about breast cancer risk from abortion?

The book ***Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill*** by Chris Kahlenborn, MD, is available from One More Soul. Four of the seventeen chapters in this book deal with cancer risks from abortion. It contains an extensive bibliography of over 500 references on this and related topics. The material in this pamphlet is based upon Dr. Kahlenborn's book.

### Where can I find information about Natural Family Planning?

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Many Catholic dioceses have NFP offices or family life offices which can supply NFP information. Local parishes and Catholic hospitals may also be good sources.

### References

1. Brind J, Chinchilli M, et al. Induced abortion as an independent risk factor for breast cancer: a comprehensive review and meta-analysis. *J Epidemiol Commun H.* 10/1996; 50:481-496.
2. Breast Cancer Facts and Figures 2003-2004. American Cancer Society. ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org))
3. Daling J, Malone K, et al. Risk of breast cancer among young women: relationship to induced abortion. *JNCI.* 1994; 86(21):1584-1592.
4. Andrieu N, et al. Familial risk of breast cancer and abortion. *Cancer Detection and Prevention.* 1994; 18:51-55.

5. Ryder RE. "Natural Family Planning": Effective birth control supported by the Catholic Church. *Brit Med J.* 1993; 307:723-726.
6. Clarck RM, Chua T. Breast cancer and pregnancy: the ultimate challenge. *Clin Oncol.* 1989; 1:11-18.

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### Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill

BBCL \$5.95 soft cover

Dr. Chris Kahlenborn documents the effect that abortion and hormonal contraception have on breast cancer, as well as uterine, cervical, liver, and other cancers, and even the transmission of

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