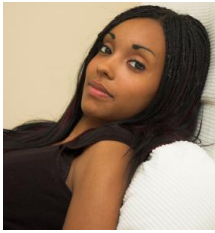


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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



## [How Does Contraceptive Pill Save 30,000 Lives Annually?](#)

### *The effect against ovarian cancer*

The pill is more than sexual freedom for a woman: in fact, it saves her life! A new meta-analysis published in the *Lancet* reveals that women on the birth control pills are safe from ovarian cancer, even decades after stopping the consumption. Subjects taking the pill for 15 years cut to 50 % their risks of developing ovarian cancer, and that effect was lasting 30 years later, even if weakened. "Not only does the pill prevent pregnancy, but in the long term, you actually get less cancer as well. It's a nice bonus," said lead author Valerie Beral, director of the Cancer Research UK Epidemiology Unit at Oxford University. The team focused on 45 researches made on 23,257 subjects with ovarian cancer, of which 31 % took the pill and 87,303 healthy subjects, 37 % of them on the pill. The women on the pill used oral contraception for about five years. Women not taking the pill presented a rate of 12 per 1,000 of ovarian cancer before age 75. This dropped to 8 per 1,000 in the case of those taking on the pill. Team's estimations are that the pill so far could have impeded around 200,000 cases of ovarian cancer and 100,000 deaths because of it. The current levels of oral contraceptive usage point that 30,000 new cases are impeded annually. Ovarian cancer is one of the most common female cancers in the developed countries; the risk increases with the age and rebound is 100 % deadly. Previously, the pill was rather known for its effect of slightly increases the risks of breast and cervical cancer, but also of conferring long-term defense against endometrial (uterine) cancer. Researchers cannot explain these opposite effects. "It may have something to do with the hormones in the contraceptives. Hormones such as estrogen can be growth-promoting in some body parts and have the opposite effect in other body parts," said Dr. Debbie Saslow, director of breast and gynecologic cancer at the American Cancer Society. No early test for ovarian cancer has been developed, and the usually late diagnosis boosts death rates amongst these patients, that's why the researchers say that the pill's protective effects against ovarian cancer are more important than the slightly increased risks of breast and cervical cancer (except the cases of women with a history of those cancers). "This is the first medication that we know of to cut ovarian cancer risk," said Beral. Other measures are more complex: pregnancy or tube ligation. The pill also has some secondary effects, like higher risk of blood clots, migraines, and high blood pressure, especially in women approaching 40 years old and in smokers. In 2002, about 120 million women took oral contraception worldwide, 70 % in developing countries.