

Leading the News

Hormonal Contraceptives May Increase Breast Cancer Risk, Study Suggests.

[ABC World News Tonight](#) (12/6, story 13, 0:25, Muir) reported on a [study](#) published in the New England Journal of Medicine finding that "women who use hormonal" contraceptives "for more than a year are at a 20 percent higher risk for breast cancer," though "the overall risk remains low," and is called "safe and effective." [ABC News](#) (12/6, Childs, Yap, Francis) reports on its website that the finding was based on a "study of 1.8 million women in Denmark" who were followed for "nearly 11 years." Study co-author Dr. Lina Mørch told ABC News, "I was hoping that I was able to recommend one product that was risk-free but could not recommend any product as risk-free." The researchers also found that "the breast cancer risk seemed to increase with the duration of hormonal contraceptive use."

Dr. Jon LaPook commented on the study for the [CBS Evening News](#) (12/6, story 11, 1:35, Holt) saying, "Most of these breast cancers were found in women in their 40s, and women using hormones for less than five years had no increased risk after being off them for six months." LaPook added, "The 20 percent translates to about one more case of breast cancer a year for ever 7,700 women." He also said that there are "potential benefits of using hormones, for example, decreasing the risk of ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer or colon cancer and the benefit of preventing an unwanted pregnancy."

[NBC Nightly News](#) (12/6, story 8, 1:50, Holt) reported, "Researchers say it's a new cause for concern and something women need to discuss with their doctors." Dr. John Torres said, "Doctors had hoped new forms of birth control using fewer hormones might be safer," but "they still increase a woman's risk of breast cancer." Torres added, "This increase may seem like a lot, but overall the risk of developing breast cancer is still relatively low." [NBC News](#) (12/6, Fox) on its website reports that "the actual danger is 'quite small,'" and "hormone-infused devices such as vaginal rings, implants and some IUDs also appear to raise the risk." The finding is "a disappointment." Dr. Rebecca Starck, a gynecologist at the Cleveland Clinic, said, "The absolute overall increased risk...was one extra case of breast cancer for every 7,690 women using hormonal contraception for one year."

The [New York Times](#) (12/6, Rabin, Subscription Publication) calls it "a small but significant increase in the risk for breast cancer." The Times adds that "many women have believed that newer hormonal contraceptives are much safer" than older forms, but "the study found few differences in risk" between new and old. Dr. Marisa Weiss, an oncologist, said, "Gynecologists just assumed that a lower dose of hormone meant a lower risk of cancer." Dr. Chris Zahn, vice president for practice activities at the **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**, said, "It's important that women feel confident and comfortable with their contraceptive choice." The Times explains that while the increase for a 20-year-old means that her risk of breast cancer is still "less than one-tenth of 1 percent," but for a 40-year-old, it means a change from 1 in 69 to 1 in 57.

[Bloomberg News](#) (12/6, Lauerma) reports that while it was thought that "newer birth control drugs" would reduce the risk, "it turns out they didn't." The study found that "the longer they take them, the greater the chance they will develop breast cancer," thought, it adds, the risk is "somewhat offset by reduced risks of cancer – of the ovaries, endometrium, and digestive system" found by "other studies."

The [AP](#) (12/6, Johnson) reports the newer formulations "have fewer side effects" than in the past, but "still modestly raise the risk of breast cancer."

[Reuters](#) (12/6, Emery) reports women using "hormone-based contraception face a 20 percent higher risk of breast cancer," and the study found that most of the cases "were seen in women using oral contraceptives in their 40s."

[Newsweek](#) (12/6, Sheridan) reports the risk increased by "as much as 38 percent" for "women who had used birth control for more than 10 years." The increased risk, one epidemiologist said, was equal to the increase from drinking alcohol. **ACOG's** Zahn said, "As with any medical intervention, hormonal contraception is associated with specific health risks."

The following sources also covered the study: [NPR](#) (12/6), [TIME](#) (12/6, Park), [The Guardian \(UK\)](#) (12/6, Boseley), [HealthDay](#) (12/6, Thompson), [Ob Gyn News](#) (12/6, Lacy), and [MedPage Today](#) (12/6, Monaco).