

# OCs Protect Against Ovarian Cancer Long Term

BY BRUCE K. DIXON  
Chicago Bureau

The use of oral contraceptives confers long-term protection against ovarian cancer, and the longer birth control pills are used, the greater their protective effect, according to an analysis of 45 epidemiologic studies from around the world.

The findings suggest that oral contraceptives (OCs) have prevented about 200,000 ovarian cancers and 100,000 deaths from the disease worldwide during the past half century. In coming decades, the number of cancers prevented will rise to an estimated 30,000 per year, according to the Collaborative Studies of Ovarian Cancer, led by Dr. Valerie Beral of the Cancer Research UK Epidemiology Unit at Oxford (England) University. (Lancet 2008;371:303-14).

Noting that the findings are not unexpected, the editors of the Lancet called the study "im-

pressive and compelling." The findings "set a new standard in primary prevention for a deadly cancer and have important public health implications," they wrote in an editorial (Lancet 2008;371:275).

The collaborative analysis "brings unequivocal good news," Dr. Eduardo L. Franco and Dr. Eliane Duarte-Franco wrote in a commentary (Lancet 2008;371:277-8). "Women and their health-care providers are once again at a balancing act of judging risks versus benefits."

The analysis included 13 prospective studies, 19 case-control studies with population controls, and 13 case-control studies with hospital controls. Conducted in 21 countries, the studies included 23,000 women with malignant epithelial or nonepithelial ovarian cancer and more than 87,000 controls without ovarian cancer who had not undergone bilateral oophorectomy. On average, the cancers

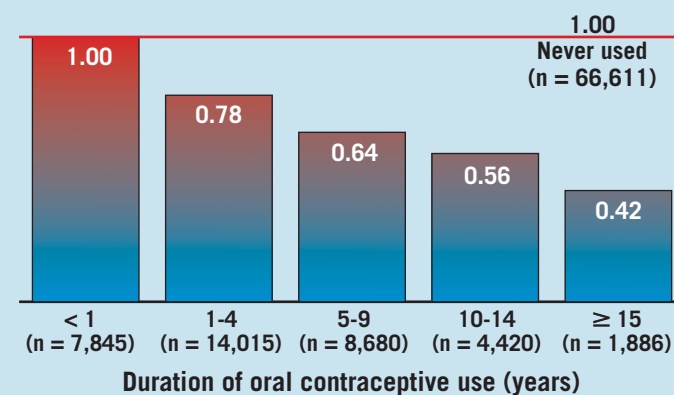
were diagnosed in 1993, and the mean age at diagnosis was 56 years.

Overall, 31% of the women with ovarian cancer and 37% of the controls had used OCs for an average of 4.4 and 5 years, respectively. Ovarian cancer diagnoses, on average, were made about 20 years after the women first used OCs.

Each of the three types of study design yielded a highly significant reduction in the relative risk of ovarian cancer in OC users compared with never users. "The overall relative risk decreased by 20% for each 5 years of use," the authors wrote. Women who had used OCs for about 15 years had a 50% risk reduction.

"The proportional declines in relative risk per 5 years [of OC] use were 29% for those whose use had ceased less than 10 years previously, 19% for use ceased 10-19 years previously, and 15% for use ceased 20-29 years previously," they reported.

## Relative Risk for Ovarian Cancer Lower With Longer Oral Contraceptive Use



Source: Lancet

In high-income countries, 10 years of OC use reduced ovarian cancer incidence before age 75 from 12 per 1,000 women to 8 per 1,000, and mortality from 7 per 1,000 women to 5 per 1,000, the researchers estimated.

There was limited evidence that OC use prevents mucinous

ovarian cancer, which accounts for fewer than 15% of all cases, commented Dr. Franco of the department of oncology and epidemiology, McGill University, Montreal, and Dr. Duarte-Franco of the Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, also in Montreal. ■

## Cranberry Products Are Shown to Cut Symptomatic UTIs in Women

BY JONATHAN GARDNER  
London Bureau

Cranberry juice, which is frequently used as a home remedy to treat and prevent urinary tract infection, has been shown in a meta-analysis to reduce significantly the incidence of symptomatic urinary tract infections in women.

An analysis of four randomized controlled trials, comprising 665 participants, showed that cranberry products significantly reduced the incidence of symptomatic UTI at 12 months, compared with a placebo (relative risk 0.65), and were most effective in women with recurrent UTIs.

Ruth Jepson, senior research fellow at

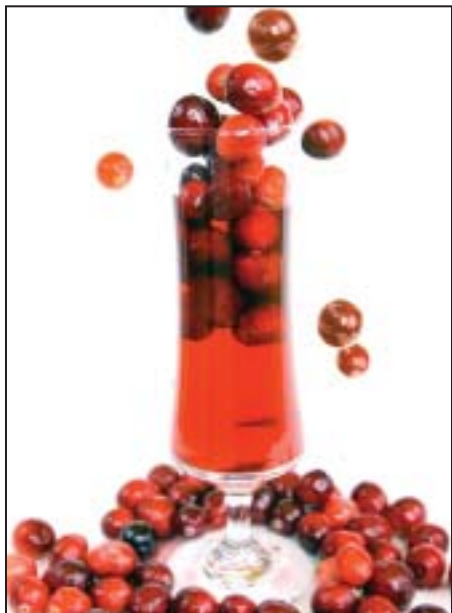
the University of Stirling, Scotland, and associates searched medical databases to identify studies that used cranberry juice or tablets to prevent recurrences of UTI. Ten studies, comprising 1,049 patients, met the reviewers' data-quality standards (Cochrane Database Syst. Rev. 2008 Jan. 23 [doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD001321.pub4]).

In one Scottish study that focused on 376 men and women aged 60 years or older, there was no significant difference in the number of symptomatic UTIs between patients drinking 300 mL/day of cranberry juice and those drinking a placebo beverage.

In a second study of 192 elderly women in the United States randomized to a group drinking 300 mL/day of cranberry juice or a placebo, those in the intervention group were at a reduced risk of asymptomatic infections indicated by bacteriuria with pyuria.

Of two randomized controlled trials that focused on women with symptomatic recurrent lower UTI or with a current UTI, subjects in the intervention arm were at a reduced risk of subsequent infections than that of those in the placebo group.

In catheterized patients, no statistical difference was found between patients in intervention groups or placebo arms either for symptomatic or asymptomatic infections. In a Canadian study of 40 children who had been intermittently catheterized, 89% of those in the intervention group drinking 15 mL/kg a day of a cranberry beverage dropped out, with just over half citing taste as a factor. "The large number of dropouts/withdrawals from some studies [suggests] cranberry juice may not be acceptable over long periods of time." ■



In four trials, data showed that cranberry products reduced the incidence of UTI.

## Rhubarb Extract Seems Safe and Effective in Soothing Hot Flashes

BY FRAN LOWRY  
Orlando Bureau

An extract derived from the roots of the rhubarb plant has been shown in a randomized, placebo-controlled trial to provide relief of vasomotor symptoms in peri- and postmenopausal women, Dr. David S. Riley told the annual meeting of the North American Menopause Society.

The trial, which was conducted at University Hospital, Frankfurt, Germany, showed that women who consumed one tablet containing 4 mg of the extract *Rheum raphonticum*, or ERr 731, daily for 12 weeks had a significant reduction in the number and severity of hot flashes, compared with women on placebo.

Although ERr 731 has been available in Germany for several years, it is still relatively unknown on this side of the Atlantic, Dr. Riley of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, explained in a telephone interview. As a consultant to the German researchers, he thought it would be interesting to present their data to clinicians in the United States.

"This is a substance that has been on the market in Germany since 1993, and the research was done to reregister it as an herbal medication," said Dr. Riley, who also is editor in chief of *Explore, The Journal of Science and Healing*.

Hormone therapy, the standard for relieving vasomotor symptoms of menopause, can have unwanted side effects; other therapies, which do not have troublesome side effects, are of questionable efficacy, he said.

In this study, 112 perimenopausal women were randomized to 4 mg/day of

ERr 731 or to placebo for 12 weeks. At the beginning of the trial, all of the women had a menopause rating scale (MRS) score of at least 18, which meant that their menopausal symptoms were moderate to severe. Factors rated in the MRS score included hot flashes and sweating, heart complaints, sleep disturbances, depressive mood, irritability, anxiety, physical and mental exhaustion, sexual problems, urinary tract complaints, vaginal dryness, and joint and muscle complaints.

The women rated their symptoms on a scale from 0 (no symptoms) to 4 (very severe symptoms). The maximum obtainable MRS score was 44 points.

After 12 weeks of treatment, there was a significant reduction in MRS score in the women taking the extract; 46 of the 56 (82%) women randomized to ERr 731 had a decrease of at least 10 points in their MRS score, compared with 2 (4%) of the women randomized to placebo.

ERr 731 was associated with a significant reduction in hot flashes, compared with placebo, from 11 a day at baseline, to 4 a day at 12 weeks, Dr. Riley said.

The compound was safe and was associated with no breast tenderness or increase in endometrial thickness as assessed on ultrasound and biopsies, no changes in liver enzymes, no changes in blood pressure, no changes in weight, no increase in estradiol or progesterone, and no enhanced bone turnover. "Women are looking for safe and natural alternatives to hormones to relieve their menopausal symptoms. . . . This compound is exciting and shows promise." ■