

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY(HRT)

midlife and beyond...



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HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy-also known as hormone therapy, menopausal hormone therapy, and estrogen replacement therapy) replaces the oestrogen that was produced by the ovaries before the menopause. After the period stops, woman's hormone levels fall, causing uncomfortable symptoms like hot flashes and vaginal dryness, and sometimes conditions like osteoporosis. HRT is used to treat such common symptoms of menopause and aging. The level of oestrogen in HRT is designed to reduce or stop altogether the symptoms of the menopause outlined above, though it does not restore oestrogen levels to pre-menopause level.

Unlike the contraceptive pill, oestrogen replacement in HRT mimics the natural oestrogen molecule in a similar way to thyroid replacement. It is known that the contraceptive pill is 50 to 100 times stronger than HRT in all its effects as unlike HRT it is synthetic, takes a long time to be cleared from the body and therefore stays in the body much longer.

Benefits of HRT

- Relief from the sometimes severe symptoms of the menopause listed above and improved quality of life
- Using HRT from menopause until middle or late fifties is known to decrease risk of osteoporosis

Effect of Estrogen

Estrogen controls how a woman's body uses calcium, which strengthens bones, and raises good cholesterol in the blood.

Effect of Progesterone

If a woman still has her uterus, taking estrogen without progesterone raises her risk for cancer of the endometrium, the lining of the uterus. Progesterone lowers that risk by thinning the lining.

Estrogen Therapy

Doctors generally suggest a low dose of estrogen for women who have had a hysterectomy, the surgery to remove the uterus. Estrogen comes in different forms. The daily pill and patch are the most popular, but the hormone also is available in a vaginal ring, gel, or spray form.

Estrogen/Progesterone/Progestin Hormone Therapy

This is often called combination therapy, since it combines doses of estrogen and progestin, the synthetic form of progesterone. It's meant for women who still have their uterus.

The biggest debate about HRT is whether its risks outweigh its benefits.

Risks of Hormone Replacement Therapy

In recent years, several studies showed that women taking HRT have a higher risk of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, and blood clots. The largest study was the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a 15-year study tracking over 161,800 healthy, postmenopausal women. The study found that women who took the combination therapy had an increased risk of heart disease. The overall risks of long-term use outweighed the benefits, the study showed.

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But after that, a handful of studies based on WHI research have focused on the type of therapy, the way it's taken, and when treatment started. Those factors can produce different results. One recent study by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center reveals that antidepressants offer benefits similar to low-dose estrogen without the risks.

With all the conflicting research, it's easy to see why HRT can be confusing.

If a woman has these conditions, she cannot take HRT:

- » Blood clots
- » Cancer (such as breast, uterine, or endometrial)
- » Heart or liver disease
- » Heart attack
- » Known or suspected pregnancy
- » Stroke

Side Effects of Hormone Replacement Therapy

HRT comes with side effects. Call doctor in case of these symptoms:

- » Bloating
- » Breast swelling or tenderness
- » Headaches
- » Mood changes
- » Nausea
- » Vaginal bleeding



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