

## Hormone Therapy (HT) Menopause Treatment

Hormone therapy (HT) is the use of prescribed estrogen and progesterone to ease symptoms of menopause. Symptoms include hot flashes, vaginal dryness and mood swings. There are 2 kinds of HT – estrogen and progesterone. Both are female hormones. They may be in the form of pills, patches, vaginal creams or rings or long-acting injections (shots). This treatment is best when other non-hormone therapies have not helped. Side effects of HT may include weight gain and breast pain. This usually occurs when you start HT and lessens over a few months.

### Women's Health Initiative

The National Institutes of Health Women's Health Initiative (WHI) is a major long-term research program. It aims to address the most common causes of death, disability and poor quality of life in postmenopausal women – cardiovascular disease, cancer and osteoporosis. This information may help you make a decision about taking HT.

Women in the study were divided into 2 groups:

- Those who had a hysterectomy (surgical removal of the uterus) and were on estrogen only
- Those who had not had a hysterectomy and were on estrogen and progesterone

Taking estrogen alone increases the risk of uterine cancer. Therefore, women who still had their uterus took estrogen and progesterone. Progesterone lessens the negative effects of estrogen alone on the uterus.

### HT With Estrogen and Progesterone (No Hysterectomy)

The **benefits** of estrogen and progesterone (compared to a placebo) include:

- Lessened menopausal symptoms
- Decreased risk of bone fractures linked with osteoporosis
- Decreased risk of colorectal cancer

The **risks** of estrogen and progesterone (compared to a placebo) include:

- Increased risk of stroke
- Increased risk of coronary heart disease in some women
- Increased risk of breast cancer
- Increased risk of blood clots
- Increased risk of gallbladder disease
- Increased risk of dementia and/or mild cognitive impairment in women age 65 years and older

No increase or decrease was shown in the risk of uterine cancer.

## HT With Estrogen Only (Hysterectomy)

The **benefits** of estrogen alone (compared to a placebo) include:

- Lessened menopause symptoms
- Decreased risk of bone fractures linked with osteoporosis

The **risks** of estrogen alone include:

- Increased risk of stroke
- Increased risk of blood clots
- Increased risk of dementia and/or mild cognitive impairment in women aged 65 years and older

No increase or decrease was shown in the risk of heart disease, breast cancer or colorectal cancer.

## If You Have Not Had a Hysterectomy

Women often try to understand how taking hormones affects their cancer risk. Estrogen and progesterone increases breast cancer risk but does not increase uterine cancer risk. Estrogen alone does not increase breast cancer risk but increases uterine cancer risk in women who still have a uterus.

The Million Women Study is another study which determined the effect of HT on postmenopausal women's health. It provides information on the balance of the risk between these two cancers. Women with a uterus who took estrogen alone had fewer breast and uterine cancer cases combined than women who took progesterone and estrogen.

If you have not had a hysterectomy, talk with your health care team to decide if HT is the best choice for you.

## Is hormone therapy right for you?

### Determine Your Risk

More details can help you make a decision about HT. Ask your doctor to:

- Check your risk for blood clots, stroke and heart attack. Risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, sedentary lifestyle and family history of heart disease.
- Calculate your lifetime breast cancer risk with the Gail Model Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool ([www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool](http://www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool)).
- Check and review your risk for osteoporosis. A bone mineral density test is one way to diagnose osteoporosis. You may also want to have your Vitamin D levels tested.

### Make an Educated Decision

Some women may decide HT is a good choice. Some may decide to use other approaches. This is a personal decision. Make it based on your medical and family history. If you chose to

# Patient Education



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take HT, it is recommended that you take the lowest dose for the shortest amount of time to decrease menopausal symptoms.

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