

Managing Menopause Safely: Why Women with a Personal History or With Elevated Risks of Developing Breast Cancer Should Avoid Hormone Replacement Therapy

If you have been identified as having an elevated risk of developing breast cancer or have a history of hormone-positive breast cancer, it's crucial to understand how Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can impact your health. While HRT is commonly used to manage menopausal symptoms, it may increase your risk of developing breast cancer, particularly for those already at elevated risk. This document will explain the importance of avoiding HRT and how our clinic can assist you in managing menopausal symptoms safely through non-hormonal options.

Understanding Your Risk

Being high-risk for breast cancer means you may have a higher likelihood of developing breast cancer compared to the general population. Factors contributing to this risk can include:

- **Age** at first menstruation.
- **Age** at first childbirth.
- **Body Mass Index (BMI)**, especially in postmenopausal women.
- Use of **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**.
- History of **benign breast disease or prior breast cancer**.
- **Family history** of breast or ovarian cancer.
- **Genetic mutations** such as BRCA1 or BRCA2.

These factors, combined with your personal and family history, guide your risk assessment and help in making informed decisions about managing your health.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) and Breast Cancer Risk

Hormone Replacement Therapy has been linked to an increased risk of breast cancer. This therapy is often prescribed to alleviate common menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats, and vaginal dryness. However, breast tissue is highly sensitive to hormones, especially estrogen and progesterone. These hormones play a critical role in the development and function of breast tissue but can also stimulate the growth of hormone-sensitive breast cancer cells. When HRT is taken, particularly combined estrogen and progestin, the levels of these hormones increase in the body, which can promote the growth of existing cancer cells or initiate the development of new ones. HRT can also lead to increased breast density.

Specifically, studies have shown that HRT can:

- Increase the risk of developing breast cancer, particularly in women who use it for longer periods.
- Make breast tissue denser, which can make it harder to detect breast cancer early through mammograms.
- Potentially lead to a more aggressive form of breast cancer if it does develop.

Given these risks, avoiding HRT is a critical step in managing your health if you are at an elevated risk or have a history of hormone-positive breast cancer.

Non-Hormonal Management of Menopausal Symptoms

We understand that menopausal symptoms can be challenging and impact your daily life. However, there are effective non-hormonal strategies available to manage these symptoms safely. If you experience menopausal symptoms, it is important to reach out to your provider at Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center. We specialize in helping women with elevated breast cancer risks and hormone-positive breast cancer survivors manage their symptoms safely without the use of HRT. Our team is dedicated to providing personalized care and effective non-hormonal options tailored to your unique needs.

Conclusion

Avoiding HRT is a crucial step in reducing your breast cancer risk if you are considered high-risk. However, this does not mean you have to suffer through menopausal symptoms without relief. There are many effective non-hormonal options available, and our clinic is here to support you every step of the way. Our team is here to help you navigate this stage of life with confidence and care. Don't hesitate to reach out if you need assistance or have any questions about your health.