



ABCs of HORMONE REPLACEMENT

Ask Your Pharmacist

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These findings contrast the previous results from the Women's Health Initiative. In 2002, a large-scale study by the National Institutes of Health, called the Women's Health Initiative, was stopped early because of evidence linking hormone therapy to a slightly increased risk of stroke, heart disease and breast cancer.

The Women's Health Initiative is a 15-year-long study of the causes and management of diseases affecting older women. So far, the research has produced a complicated picture of the risks and benefits related to hormone therapy.

Doctors used to advise women who were taking hormone therapy to relieve symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes, to continue taking the hormones on a long-term basis to help reduce their chances of developing osteoporosis and heart disease. Now they recommend that women take hormone therapy primarily for the relief of menopausal symptoms and to take the lowest dose of the hormones for the shortest time possible. That's why doctors now prescribe lower doses of estrogen and progestin, which are usually less than what the body produces naturally before menopause.

Estrogen Replacement Therapy (ERT) and Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) explained

Estrogen is a generic term used to describe female steroid compounds, which are formed by the ovaries, placenta, testes, and adrenal glands. Estrogens may also be isolated from plants or produced synthetically. Besides stimulation of secondary sexual characteristics, estrogens influence other systems in the body, including growth and maturation of long bones.

Hormone replacement therapy usually comes at a time of menopause, but may be considered treatment for other female conditions attributable to estrogen deficiency, including the stoppage of lactation or the suppression of ovulation. Two prominent forms of therapy exist: hormone replacement therapy and estrogen replacement therapy.

Estrogen replacement therapy uses lower doses of estrogen and will generally be used for women who have undergone surgical menopause. The major benefit sought is to decrease complications of osteoporosis, namely hip and spine fractures.

For women going through menopause naturally, there is some concern that estrogen, by itself, will over stimulate the uterine lining, which could lead to cancerous activity. Consequently, estrogen is combined with progesterone, under the treatment known as hormone replacement.

Although hormone therapy options

for your best health

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HORMONE REPLACEMENT (continued)

abound, many women report fears about using hormone replacement therapy after hearing conflicting reports about increased risk of breast and uterine cancer. Whether the final analysis of this is confirmed or denied, it is reasonable to assume there are concerns.

Further complicating the mess is the media-hyped emergence of natural product information, much of which is incorrect or misleading. For example, you may have heard sound bites on news shows about the "herb of the month" and its benefits in female health.

This sends hordes of shoppers to stores for the products, without complete knowledge of benefits, risks, and potential interactions the herb may pose. However, in the face of the above studies, it is not surprising that many women are seeking alternative treatments for their various conditions.

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Several studies suggest that women very often do not indicate to their physicians and pharmacists if they are taking an alternative form of treatment. There is an obvious danger in this, as a medication prescribed by a doctor is the result of his knowledge of the patient's condition and current drug profile. Not knowing all the facts may lead to an improper prescription.

Until recently, estrogen replacement therapy consisted of prescription medication. Pharmacists have been recently introduced to specialized treatment plans for estrogen replacement, as well as new delivery formats of the hormone. Physicians are now prescribing novel approaches to treatment, such as gels, creams, and the use of natural estrogens, or phytoestrogens. Our specially trained pharmacists are versed in all these areas and can provide you with information about them and even have special preparation specially compounded for you.

There is a good deal of information about this subject.

Some of the information is good, some not. It is important that you talk to your physician or pharmacist about all the options in hormone replacement. Our pharmacists will be glad to guide you through this maze and are always ready to talk to you about maintaining good health.