

HRT May be Right for Some Women

There are women who cannot control hot flashes, sweats, insomnia or mood changes without the use of hormones. These women may choose to continue HRT to relieve these life-altering symptoms with the knowledge and understanding that they are still at increased risk of increased complications from using HRT. Some women may decide that the benefits of treatment are larger than the risks in their particular situation. This decision should be made with a physician.



HRT may be a reasonable choice for some women with severe menopause symptoms.

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Hormone Replacement Therapy

INTERNAL MEDICINE:
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Hormone Therapy: Not for Most Women

The results of recent studies done to postmenopausal test hormone replacement therapy (HRT) have shed a doubtful eye on whether HRT should be used for any women. The use of hormones after menopause has been shown to increase the risk of many serious diseases (see table to right). The HERS II study demonstrated several years ago that women who take estrogens have more heart disease and death from heart disease in the first two years of therapy. Subsequently, the WHI study has demonstrated increases in breast cancer, stroke, blood clots and dementia and other memory problems.

The benefits from the therapy are much less than ever considered previously. (See discussion about individual decisions on the back panel.)

Not all physicians will be quick to adopt this new information as it represents a major change in recommendations to patients. You must be informed, however, so that you can participate in the decision that may have tremendous impact on your health.



Women should not take HRT unless they have a very specific individual reason.

What about using estrogen alone?

It is true that most of the studies (especially the WHI) have been done with combination therapy (estrogen plus progesterone). This fact does not mean that estrogen therapy alone is safe until proven bad. This is the logic that was used initially to recommend HRT at all and has been shown to be incorrect. **It is much safer to assume that all HRT is dangerous until proven otherwise and preliminary evidence from WHI is starting confirm this at least with respect to stroke.**

What are the alternatives for treating my symptoms?

Unfortunately, no treatment is as effective as HRT in treating the hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia and mood changes. The use of soy has been shown to decrease some of the symptoms associated with menopause. The use of supplements appears to be as effective as natural soy eaten in food products.

Black cohosh is another supplement that can reduce menopause symptoms. Recent studies suggest, however, that this herb may cause breast cancer to grow more aggressively and metastasize (spread) sooner. Therefore, the herb is no longer recommended for general use until more information is known.

A recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (May 2003) found that women taking HRT did not have a significantly improved quality of life.

Why Didn't We Know This Sooner?

HRT has been recommended for decades in women after menopause. There were no scientific studies to

prove that the presumed benefits of estrogen were actually present. The basis for the recommendations was based on observations about health and not from scientific findings. Observations are useful but can be incorrect as the recent findings from the HRT studies have shown. Medical information changes constantly and this example is one of the more significant changes in recent years.

Table Defining Risks on HRT

Complication	Increased Risk on HRT
Blood Clot	113%
Stroke	31%
Heart Disease	24% {81% in the 1st year}
Breast Cancer	24%
Dementia	100%

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