



Use of Menopausal Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

What is menopausal hormone replacement therapy (HRT)?

As you get older, certain hormone levels decrease. The decrease in the hormones estrogen and progesterone can cause symptoms during menopause. Menopausal hormone replacement therapy is the use of medications that contain hormones to help manage the side effects of menopause. Side effects of menopause can be hot flashes, vaginal dryness, the risk of bone fractures, and heart disease.

The two types of menopausal HRT are:

- Estrogen only.
- Estrogen plus progestin.

Progestin is not found in the body but is a synthetic (human-made) hormone that works like progesterone. These hormones used to make these medications come from plants and animals or are made in a laboratory. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is used to treat symptoms of menopause like hot flashes, vaginal dryness, the risk of bone fractures, and heart disease.

History of HRT

Studies done in 2002 by the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) found that HRT may increase the risk of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, and blood clots. In the early 2000s, HRT was thought to do more harm than good, and people were not taking it as often.

How is HRT used now?

Now, HRT is being used more commonly to treat symptoms of menopause, and it is thought to improve the quality of life of people going through menopause. The benefits and risks of both types of HRT are still being studied.

In more recent years, studies have found that if you take estrogen-only HRT, there is little to no increased risk of breast cancer. It also does not increase the risk for heart disease, stroke, or blood clots. Taking HRT does not increase the risk for ovarian cancer or lung cancer, and taking it can actually lower your risk of colorectal cancer. If you take estrogen plus progestin HRT, the increased risk of breast cancer is 0.005%. You should not take HRT if you have breast cancer or had it in the past. Often, if you have menopausal symptoms, you will take HRT for 2 to 5 years. Talk to your provider if you are taking it for 5 years or longer or if you are over the age of 60.

Research is ongoing about the benefits and risks of HRT. It is important that you get the health exams and cancer screenings recommended by your healthcare provider. If you are considering taking HRT to help with menopausal symptoms, ask your healthcare provider any questions you have about taking it.

To learn about factors that could affect your cancer risk, use the [Reduce My Risk](#) tool.

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