

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Women take hormone replacement therapy, or HRT, at the menopause or any time afterwards for several reasons.

What does HRT do?

- *HRT helps relieve the symptoms of menopause. Eg. hot flushes, mood changes, irritability and depression, sleeplessness, muscle and joint pains and sexual changes.*
- *HRT also has long term beneficial effects. In particular, it protects women from heart disease and osteoporosis (thinning of the bones).*

What am I taking?

If you are on HRT, you will be taking an oestrogen tablet every day. You might be taking progestogen tablets for two weeks each month, or every day with the oestrogen.

The oestrogen tablet is a natural hormone very similar to the hormone a woman's body produces before menopause. It is responsible for relieving the symptoms of menopause.

The progestogen protects the lining of the uterus from over-stimulation by the oestrogen. It is essential in women who have not had a hysterectomy.

What are the side effects?

Some women experience breast tenderness, bloating or irregular bleeding when starting HRT. These problems usually settle by changing the medication or dosage, and rarely last long. Women who are well past the menopause generally will not have 'periods' on HRT. Those who are close



HOT FLUSH



IRRITABILITY



DEPRESSION



SLEEPLESSNESS

to menopause will usually continue to have light periods for a few years.

What about the risk of breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the one serious risk that may be associated with taking HRT. We know there is no increased risk of breast cancer in the first five years on HRT, but after that time the risk appears to increase slightly. All women taking HRT should have regular mammograms to detect early cancer.

Despite this, the benefits of long term use of HRT (reducing heart attacks and osteoporosis by 50%) greatly outweigh the possible small increased risk of breast cancer.

Who should take HRT?

Every woman should decide for herself. Many women cope well with the menopause, and many natural therapies also can help. A woman's doctor can assess her long term risks of heart disease and osteoporosis. Factors such as family history, high blood pressure or cholesterol, and bone loss can all help a woman decide if HRT is for her.

Taking HRT may be a life long commitment. Every woman should consider it carefully in the light of all the information available to her, and discuss the options with her GP.

HRT can help relieve some of the symptoms of menopause