

Myth: A pharmacy can make a BHRT drug just for you based on hormone levels in a saliva sample.

Fact: Hormone levels in saliva do not accurately reflect the amount of hormones a woman has in her body. These tests are useful to tell if a woman is menopausal or not but they have not been shown to be useful for adjusting hormone therapy dosages.

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Myth: Bio-identical hormone products can prevent or cure heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and breast cancer.

Fact: BHRT drugs have not been shown to prevent or cure any of these diseases.

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Myth: If BHRT products were unsafe, there would be a lot of reports of bad side effects.

Fact: BHRT products are typically made in pharmacies who aren't required to report adverse events, so there is no way to know what risks are associated.

Myth: BHRT products that contain estriol, a weak form of estrogen, are safer than FDA-approved estrogen products.

Fact: FDA has not approved any drug containing estriol. The safety and effectiveness of estriol are unknown

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Myth: All women who take FDA-approved HRT drugs are going to get blood clots, heart attacks, strokes, breast cancer, or gall bladder disease.

Fact: Like all medicines, hormone therapy has risks and benefits. For some women, hormone therapy may increase their chances of getting these conditions. However, there are no convincing data that there is less risk of developing these condition when taking a BHRT.

You can find help and more information you can trust about menopause symptoms and treatment on the following recommended internet site menopauseandu.ca.

Adapted from,
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. Fact Sheet: Hormone Therapy & Menopause, 2008, www.menopauseandu.ca
- FDA Consumer Health Information. Bio-Identicals: Sorting Myths from Facts, 2008, www.fda.gov

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY

PATIENT INFORMATION



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What is Menopause?

Menopause is defined as the absence of menstrual periods for 1 year. The signs and symptoms that many women experience during the years leading up to menopause are caused by gradually decreasing levels of estrogen. You may have only a few symptoms or you may have many. Symptoms can range from being mild to severe and may include hot flashes, vaginal dryness, bone changes, mood changes, headaches, sleep disturbances, change in sexual desire etc. To help manage these symptoms some women may try hormone therapy.

How Hormone Replacement Therapy Works

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is sometimes prescribed to boost hormone levels and provide relief from menopause symptoms. HRT helps restore balance in a woman's body after her ovaries have stopped producing estrogen and progesterin. It may involve the use of estrogen alone or may combine estrogen and progesterin. Women who have undergone a hysterectomy (and therefore have no uterus) are typically prescribed estrogen therapy, while others are given the combination pills because progesterin can help protect you from endometrial cancers.

Finding the right hormone therapy can take time, and may involve trying different combinations and dosages of estrogen and progesterin. To help address symptoms such as hot flashes, HRT may be given in the form of oral medications, skin patches or gels. In other cases, estrogen creams, tablets or rings may be recommended. The effectiveness of HRT will vary person to person.

Risks

Overall, the risks associated with HRT are lower than originally thought, and research has found that HRT offers potential heart-health and general wellness benefits. Nonetheless, there are certain risks to be aware of:

- Slightly increased risk of blood clots
- Increased risk of stroke for older women with high blood pressure
- Increase risk of Heart disease for women who start HRT over age 60
- Increased risk of breast cancer if HRT is used for an extended period of time after menopause

Side Effects

Women may experience some breast tenderness, bloating, nausea and headaches after HRT use begins; adjustments can be made to deal with these side effects.

Surgical Menopause

Having your ovaries removed may start "Surgical Menopause". This can result in women experiencing more severe menopausal symptoms than they would have if they were to experience menopause naturally. HRT can sometimes be prescribed to help manage these symptoms.

Bio-Identical Hormone Replacement Therapy

Sellers of bio-identical hormones, also known as **Bio-identical Hormone Replacement Therapy** (BHRT) have made many claims suggesting their products are identical to hormones made by the body and these "all-natural" pills, creams, lotions and gels are without the risks of other HRT. There is NO acceptable evidence that BHRT is safe or effective, however, according to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, and because these drugs are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Health Canada, their risks are unknown.