

# Happy Hormones

## FOR LIFE

## HRT – Frequently Asked Questions

**Many women can get relief from menopausal symptoms just by changing their diet and lifestyle, and taking some targeted supplements. However, every woman is unique and while diet and lifestyle can make a huge difference, replacing hormone levels can be a life saver for many women. And vital if you have had an early menopause or a surgically induced menopause (partial or full hysterectomy or oophorectomy).**

We are not medical doctors, but we are experts in hormones so we get asked a lot about HRT. We believe every woman deserves to be fully informed about what treatments are right for her. So we hope this guide is helpful.

### What are the benefits of hormone replacement?

The right type and dose of HRT can work really well to ease the symptoms of the menopause. It can also reduce your risk of osteoporosis, heart disease and dementia often caused by low levels of sex hormones.

HRT is a safe and effective treatment for most healthy women with symptoms who are going through the menopause.

### Why is there so much controversy about HRT?

The benefits of HRT had been promoted since the 1950s and it was standard practice for women to take it once they reached menopause. However, in 2002, a large study by the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) in the US sent a shock wave when it revealed that HRT (those taking a mix of Premarin and Provera) increased a woman's risk of heart disease, stroke and breast cancer. Many women stopped taking it, and advice was given to those taking it to only take it for a short period of time. A study published in 2013 followed a sample of these women for 10 years, after which they estimated that 50,000 women in this age group may have died prematurely by avoiding oestrogen replacement.

These and subsequent studies were all done on conventional HRT which comprised of 'synthetic' hormones. These synthetic hormones act in a similar way to your own hormones but are molecularly different.

Thankfully, we've moved away from the days of being given oestrogen from pregnant horse urine (yes seriously!), but we are still commonly prescribed synthetic hormones in the form of oral oestrogens. and progestogens (not progesterone) that are taken orally or in a combined patch.

These synthetic hormones are the ones associated with increased health risks and side effects. However even these forms of HRT are not as risky as the media would have you believe. Your risk of breast cancer for example is much higher if you're obese or drink too much alcohol.

Fortunately nowadays there are modern forms of HRT that are much safer.

## What is body or bio identical HRT?

Fortunately more and more doctors are switching to 'body-identical' hormone replacement. The terms 'body identical' and 'bio identical' are one and the same thing.

- **Body Identical;** in the UK, this is the NHS term for naturally derived hormones. The hormones used are still made in the lab, but are chemically identical to your own hormones. They are obtained primarily from plants (soya beans and wild yam) and pharmaceutically transformed into human body identical hormones.
- **Bio Identical;** private doctors and clinics prescribe 'bio identical' hormones. Just like 'body identical' hormones, they are naturally derived hormones, however they have been criticised by some medical professionals as unsafe and unproven as the compounding pharmacies that produce them are not widely regulated. However they have become popular as many GP's are still reluctant to prescribe body identical HRT, they include testosterone and DHEA (not available currently on the NHS) and they are made to order for your exact dose by the compounding pharmacy.

## Is Body Identical HRT safer?

Naturally occurring body identical hormones are not thought to carry the same risks as synthetic hormones, as the body treats them in a similar way to your own hormones.

Oestrogen is usually given transdermally (as a patch, gel or spray), absorbed directly through your skin into your bloodstream. This means that it bypasses your liver and causes less side effects. In addition, your liver produces clotting factors, which means that if a tablet of oestrogen is taken, there is a small increased risk of a blood clot occurring. This risk of clot is not present however, in women who take oestrogen through the skin as a patch, gel or spray.

The older types of progestogens given as tablets or as a combination patch, can be associated with a slightly higher risk of blood clot and heart disease. Studies have shown that women who take Utrogestan however, do not have a higher risk of clot or heart disease.

## Which Body identical HRT brands are available on the NHS?

### Oestrogen

Body Identical oestrogen available is in a patch, gel or spray form, as well as vaginal pessaries and creams;

- **Gel;** Oestrogel, Sandrena
- **Patch;** Estradot, Evorel, Elleste Solo, Estraderm, FemSeven Mono, Progynova
- **Spray;** Lenzetto

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- Local Oestrogen applied in the vagina can also be very helpful for vaginal dryness, itching, redness, bladder issues. They are low dose so can be taken safely by most women. These include; Vagifem (oestradiol pessary), Imvaggis (oestriol pessary), Ovestin (oestriol cream), Blissel (Oestriol gel), Estring (ring)

## **Progesterone**

Body Identical progesterone (micronized) is available as an oral capsule;

- Utrogestan 100mg Capsules

**Testosterone** is only currently available through private doctors

## **Is HRT right for you?**

Every woman is different. I know women who thrive on HRT, while many who don't want to or can't take hormones have managed to deal with their symptoms without any prescriptions at all. The most important thing is that you take responsibility for your own health and make sure you're fully informed:

- 1 HRT has many benefits, including reducing risks of osteoporosis, heart disease and dementia
- 2 HRT is just sex hormone replacement. Diet & Lifestyle is still your foundation for all your other hormones
- 3 Modern body identical HRT is safe and effective
- 4 Do your own research and be fully informed to make the choice that's right for you
- 5 Get tested privately if you can afford it – urine tests can show your hormone levels, how efficiently you are metabolising and detoxifying your hormones and whether there are any other health risks or genetic factors that could affect your treatment.

## **Useful resources**

If you'd like to do some more research or take information to your own doctor, Dr Louise Newson's website has some great resources. Here are a few that you might find helpful;

- ▶ **HRT – the Basics**
- ▶ **HRT types and doses**
- ▶ **Family history of breast cancer**
- ▶ **Breast cancer and HRT**
- ▶ **Frequently asked questions about taking HRT**
- ▶ **HRT Prescribing Guide** (useful to take to your doctor)

## **Disclaimer**

The information presented in this guide is for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for advice from your physician or doctor or other health care professional.