

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Hormone Replacement Therapy: Is it Safe?”

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has a number of benefits but recent studies are raising concerns about its use. HRT usually refers to taking estrogen/progesterone combinations, such as Prempro or Premarin. However, many women now take HRT as a patch or gel rather than a tablet. HRT replaces female hormones that are no longer produced during the menopause and can help with hot flashes, insomnia, headaches and irritability. The symptoms of the menopause can be so severe that they interfere with day-to-day life. We have to weigh up the quality of life alongside the risks. Physicians focus on women's risk-to-benefit ratio as regards HRT. A 2012 study reported that women who take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may cut their risk of heart problems but experts are still cautious about long-term safety risks. They also found that after stopping the therapy, the women continued to see health benefits for six years. Past studies have been inconsistent regarding a possible increased risk of cancer, heart attack or stroke. Now, the [University of Oxford report in the Lancet](#), found an extra case of ovarian cancer for every 1,000 women taking the HRT drugs for five years from the age of 50 and the risk did fall after HRT stopped. A leading cancer charity said this was a "modest increase on a relatively uncommon cancer." While HRT pills can ease menopausal symptoms and may offer some protection against heart disease, this must be weighed against other possible harms. A new study by the Cochrane group has found that there is a small chance of an increased risk of blood clots and possibly stroke. But, they say their study is not the final word on HRT - more investigations are needed to get a clearer picture of all the benefits and risks. Actually, there has been a lot of research into and negative press about HRT. But, most experts agree that HRT can be a good and safe treatment to help many women control unpleasant menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes. The Cochrane Review, which only looked at women taking the oral HRT tablets, concluded that HRT may: 1) lower a woman's risk of developing heart disease, 2) increase her risk of blood clots, such as deep vein thrombosis and 3) possibly increase her risk of stroke. Still, in terms of absolute numbers, the risks were small.

In the America that I love, we realize that the risks and benefits of synthetic HRT are not clearly defined. Please remember that a physician's advice is absolutely essential when considering HRT's use, its timing, routes of delivery, and overall safety. When it comes to your health, safety always comes first! So, please freely discuss HRT with your doctor.

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