



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks  
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## "Hormone Replacement Confusion"

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has a number of benefits but recent studies are showing that it also has a number of serious side effects. HRT usually refers to taking estrogen/progesterone combinations, such as Prempro or Premarin. Several years ago researchers published data from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) postmenopausal hormone therapy trials and this data has been periodically re-evaluated. There has been good news and bad news. First, they said that HRT was dangerous in certain circumstances and later proclaimed that, "It was fine for younger women." Also, the FDA and Big Pharma more recently became involved with so-called "bio-identical HRT", which is an entirely different issue. We need to focus on women's risk-to-benefit ratio as regards HRT, while admitting that confusion abounds and that the best bet is consult your doctor to make an informed decision for personal HRT use. A new study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) is the first to report more breast cancer deaths among women taking HRT. Dr. Rowan Chlebowski of the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute, said, "As opposed to the prevailing thought of two years ago, that cancers associated with estrogen plus progesterone would be favorable and not much of a problem, we are actually showing they are associated with an increased risk of death from breast cancer." Although the risk is low, Chlebowski's team analyzed data on the more than 12,000 women and found twice as many taking HRT died from breast cancer (2.6 per 10,000 per year versus 1.3 per 10,000 women per year) compared to a placebo. Further, nearly 24% of the breast cancer patients who took HRT had tumors that had spread to the lymph nodes, compared with 16% of women taking placebos. The results included 11 years of follow-up from the Women's Health Initiative study, which in 2002 found women who took estrogen plus progesterone for five years had higher rates of ovarian cancer, breast cancer, strokes and other health problems. Pfizer, the manufacturer of the \$1 billion a year Prempro, said, "The company stands behind Prempro's current labeling, which advises doctors to prescribe the drug at the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible period of time." But, Dr. Peter Bach of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, said, "Even that may be risky and doctors should be aware that this approach has not been proven in rigorous clinical trials." What is one to do?

In the America that I love, we realize that the risks and benefits of synthetic HRT are not cut and dried. A physicians advise is absolutely essential when considering HRT's use, its timing, routes of delivery, and overall safety. When it comes to your health, safety comes first!

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