

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

1) What have I been prescribed?

You have been prescribed hormones to relieve symptoms of menopause depending on your individual situation. If you have a womb then a combination of oestrogen and progesterone (combined HRT) would be recommended.

Oestrogen: This is the core component of HRT. Delivering oestrogen through the skin is safer as there is no increased risk of clots. Therefore, it's likely that you have been prescribed a patch, gel or spray. If vaginal dryness, soreness or urinary symptom is an issue, sometimes vaginal preparation in the form of cream or ring pessaries may have been prescribed.

Progesterone: Oestrogen thickens the lining of the womb leading to small increased risk of womb cancer. Therefore, if you have a womb, progesterone is prescribed alongside to protect your womb lining.

You may have been prescribed one of the two following regimens:

- Sequential: Taken for 14 days at the end of the cycle every month along with daily oestrogen. Suitable for women who are still bleeding.
- Continuous: Taken every night with oestrogen. Suitable for women who have not had a bleed for over a year.

Mirena coil can also be used as progesterone part of HRT. It has the added benefit of providing contraception.

2) What are the benefits?

HRT is a safe and effective treatment for symptoms associated with menopause. Studies have shown HRT can lower your future risk of developing Osteoporosis and Cardiovascular disease. There are also newer studies suggesting reduced risk of developing Alzheimers, Type 2 Diabetes and Colon cancers.

3) How about the risks?

The risks are usually very small and depends on the type of HRT and your own pre-existing health risks.

- a) Risk of blood clots and stroke: There is no increased risk of blood clots and stroke from HRT if oestrogen is taken through the skin.
- b) Risk of breast cancer: The risk is related to the type of progesterone in HRT rather than oestrogen. HRT containing older synthetic types of progesterone has been linked with a small risk of developing breast cancer in women over the age of 51 years. However, taking body identical progesterone (Utrogestan) hasn't been shown to have a statistically significant increased risk of developing breast cancer.

4) What are the side effects of HRT?

Most of the side effects will settle on their own in the first few months. Common ones are:

- Vaginal bleeding (Some bleeding in the first 3 months of starting or changing HRT is normal. If this persists beyond 3 months, please arrange a review with your GP)
- Bloating
- Breast tenderness
- Feeling sick and indigestion
- Leg cramps

If side effects are intolerable, changing the dose, or switching to a different way of taking HRT can help.

5) Do I need contraception?

HRT does not provide contraceptive cover so it is still possible to get pregnant, unless you are using a mirena coil as part of your HRT. You will need additional contraception until 2 years after your last period if you are under 50 or for 1 year after the age of 50.

6) What happens next?

You will need to book a review appointment with your GP after 3 months of starting or changing HRT, and thereafter, annual review if all remains well.

7) What if it's not working?

Speak to your GP if your symptoms are not improving or if HRT is not agreeing with you. Switching delivery method or the dose of HRT can help. If your symptoms are not sufficiently controlled, you may also be offered testosterone cream or gel.

8) How long can I take the HRT for?

The length of time you may wish to take HRT depends on your individual needs. There is no set time limit on how long you can remain on HRT.

9) How do I stop taking HRT?

If you decide to come off HRT, you can do so suddenly or gradually. The chances of your symptoms coming back is the same either way.

10) Is there anything else to help with menopause symptoms?

HRT in combination with lifestyle measures such as exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, cutting down on coffee, alcohol and spicy foods, and stopping smoking can help improve your symptoms.

11) Where can I obtain more information?

You can find more information on HRT on the following links.

- <https://www.balance-menopause.com/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt/>



Some useful tips!

- How to apply oestrogen <https://www.balance-menopause.com/menopause-library/how-to-apply-oestrogen/>
- How to apply patches <https://www.balance-menopause.com/menopause-library/how-to-apply-hrt-patches/>
- How to apply oestrogen spray <https://www.balance-menopause.com/menopause-library/how-to-apply-oestrogen-spray/>