

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) fact sheet

Introduction

This fact sheet is intended to give a brief overview of HRT (Hormone replacement Therapy) and the types of HRT that exist. The information provided here is general information but the impact, risks, and effectiveness of different forms of HRT may differ according to an individual's clinical picture and it is always best discussed with a clinical professional.

What is HRT?

For people who seek help for their menopausal symptoms HRT is the most commonly prescribed treatment. You should discuss the benefits, side effects and risks of taking different HRT types with your GP, who knows your individual clinical picture.

People sometimes use alternatives to HRT, information about this can be found on the resource titled Alternative to HRT Fact Sheet (this resource is being developed and will be available soon).

There are two main hormones used in HRT:

Oestrogen: Oestrogen is a sex hormone, the levels of which drop in (peri)menopause. Types of replacement oestrogen prescribed by doctors include estradiol, estrone and estriol.

Progestogen: Progestogen is a synthetic form of progesterone (one of the naturally occurring sex hormones) developed to replace the hormone when levels drop in (peri)menopause.

HRT is taking both of these hormones (combined HRT) or oestrogen-only HRT, though this is only normally prescribed if you have had a hysterectomy (operation to remove your womb).

Ways of taking HRT:

Please Note: If you still have a womb, you will need to take progesterone as well as oestrogen. This is to reduce the risk of womb cancer.

Tablets	Both types of HRT (combined HRT and oestrogen-only) are available as tablets. They are usually taken once a day.
Skin Patches	Again, both types of HRT are available as patches. You stick them to your skin and replace them every few days.
Oestrogen Gel	Oestrogen gel is rubbed into your skin once a day.
Implants	Implants release oestrogen gradually and last for several months before they need replacing. Implants are not widely available.
An intrauterine system (IUS)	An IUS (a T shaped plastic device that a specialist doctor or nurse inserts into your womb) can be used to take progestogen; the synthetic hormone is released into the womb. An IUS can stay in place for 3-5years and acts as contraception.

<p>Vaginal Oestrogen</p>	<p>Vaginal oestrogen is not HRT. It is available as a cream, pessary or ring that is placed inside your vagina and helps to relieve vaginal dryness, it will not help with other symptoms. It can be used without taking progestogen even if you still have a womb as the amount absorbed is local and is very small.</p>
<p>Testosterone Gel</p>	<p>Testosterone gel is rubbed onto your skin. Though not currently licensed for use by women, it can be prescribed after menopause by a specialist doctor. This is if they think it might help restore your sex drive, after other forms of HRT haven't helped.</p>



Starting on HRT & HRT Treatment Routines

If you decide you would like to consider taking HRT you should discuss your options with your GP. If you are given HRT your doses may need tweaking and changing by your doctor. It can take three months before you will start noticing a difference in your symptoms.

The routine will depend on whether you're in the early stages of menopause or have had menopausal symptoms for some time.

<p>Cyclical HRT</p>	<p>Cyclical HRT is recommended for women taking combined HRT who have menopausal symptoms but still have their periods.</p> <p>Two types of Cyclical HRT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly HRT – you take oestrogen every day and take progestogen alongside it for the last 14 days of your menstrual cycle. This is for use if you have regular periods. • Three-monthly HRT – you take oestrogen every day and take progestogen alongside it for around 14 days every 3 months. This is for use if you have irregular periods.
<p>Continuous combined HRT</p>	<p>Continuous combined HRT this is recommended for women who are postmenopausal. To be postmenopausal a person will not have had a period for one-year. Continuous combined HRT involves taking estrogen and progestogen every day without break.</p>