

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT)



What Is It?

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is a treatment that alleviates symptoms of menopause by replacing hormones that decline during this stage of life, primarily oestrogen (and progesterone for those with a uterus). It is also used to prevent long-term health issues such as osteoporosis



Who Can Take HRT?

✦ Suitable for:

- Women experiencing menopausal symptoms, such as hot flushes, night sweats, mood changes, and vaginal dryness.
- Those at risk of osteoporosis or early menopause (before age 45).

✦ Unsuitable for:

- Women with a history of breast, ovarian, or womb (endometrial) cancer.
- Women with a history of blood clots, stroke, or uncontrolled high blood pressure.
- Those with liver disease or unexplained vaginal bleeding.

Always consult your doctor to assess suitability.



Side Effects

- ✦ Bloating, nausea, and indigestion
- ✦ Breast tenderness
- ✦ Headaches
- ✦ Mood changes
- ✦ Spotting or irregular bleeding (usually resolves within six months)



Risks and Benefits

✦ Benefits:

- Reduces menopausal symptoms, improving quality of life.
- Protects against osteoporosis and fractures.
- May reduce the risk of bowel cancer.

✦ Risks:

- Slightly increased risk of breast cancer (depending on type and duration of HRT).
- Slightly increased risk of blood clots and stroke (particularly with tablet forms).
- Rare risk of womb (endometrial) cancer if oestrogen is taken without progesterone.

Risks vary based on the type of HRT, dosage, and personal health history.



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Continuous Treatment vs Breaks in Progesterone

✦ Your HRT regimen depends on your individual health, age, and stage of menopause:

✦ Continuous Combined HRT

Description: Oestrogen and progesterone are taken together every day without a break.

Suitable for: Women who are postmenopausal (no periods for 12 months or more).

• Benefits:

- No monthly withdrawal bleed.
- Maintains stable hormone levels, which may minimise mood swings or other cyclical symptoms.

• Considerations:

- May take 3–6 months for your body to adjust.
- Some women may experience spotting or bleeding initially.

✦ Sequential (Cyclical) HRT

Description: Oestrogen is taken daily, and progesterone is added for part of the month (e.g., 14 days). This mimics a natural menstrual cycle.

Suitable for: Women who are perimenopausal (still experiencing periods or irregular cycles).

• Benefits:

- Provides progesterone in a structured cycle, reducing the risk of endometrial overgrowth.
- Some women find this mimics their natural hormonal rhythm and is better tolerated.

• Considerations:

- Causes a monthly withdrawal bleed, similar to a period.
- May not be ideal for women seeking to avoid bleeding.

Different Formats: Pros & Cons

✦ Oestrogen Tablets (Oral)

Pros: Convenient, widely available.

Cons: Higher risk of blood clots compared to other forms. Oestrogen is not absorbed as well as transdermal options below.

✦ Progesterone Tablets (Oral)

Pros: Micronised progesterone is bio identical and absorbed well.

Cons: Higher risk of blood clots compared to other forms. Oestrogen is not absorbed as well as transdermal.

✦ Patches

Pros: Lower risk of blood clots; easy to apply.

Cons: May cause skin irritation or fall off.

✦ Gels

Pros: Flexible dosing, fewer side effects.

Cons: Daily application required and can take 5–10 minutes to dry.

✦ Sprays

Pros: Rapid absorption, fewer side effects, precise dosage.

Cons: Not as available, absorption rates vary.

✦ Vaginal Tablets, Rings, or Creams

Pros: Targeted relief for vaginal symptoms; minimal systemic absorption.

Cons: Does not address other menopausal symptoms.

✦ Mirena Coil

Pros: Can reduce heavy bleeding, endometrial protection against cancer.

Cons: Can cause irregular and unexpected bleeding, and mood swings.

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How to Take Different Formats

- ✦ **Tablets**
Swallow daily.
- ✦ **Patches**
Apply to clean, dry skin on the lower abdomen or buttocks, replacing as instructed (e.g., twice weekly).
- ✦ **Gels/Creams**
Apply to clean, dry skin on the arms or legs daily.
- ✦ **Implants**
Inserted under the skin by a healthcare provider.
- ✦ **Topical Oestrogen**
Insert directly into the vagina as instructed.



Does HRT Delay Menopause?

HRT alleviates symptoms of menopause but does not delay or stop the natural process. It does not influence when menopause occurs biologically.



How Can I Come Off HRT?

- ✦ Gradual is recommended to minimise the return of symptoms.
- ✦ Always consult your doctor before stopping HRT to develop a suitable plan.



How Long Can You Be on HRT?

- ✦ There is no strict time limit; it varies by individual needs and risk factors.
- ✦ Generally, women take HRT for 5–10 years.
- ✦ Regular reviews with a doctor (usually annually) are essential to assess benefits and risks.



For more information

Speak to your GP or visit trusted sources like the NHS website. Always tailor decisions about HRT to your individual health needs and preferences.