

Hormone Replacement Therapy and the Risk of Breast Cancer

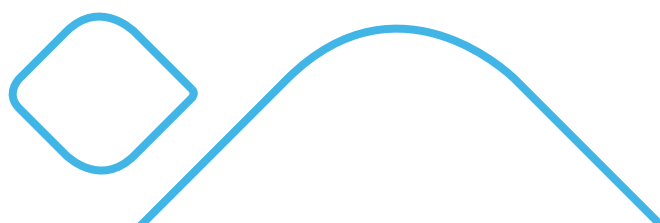
Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is a treatment used to relieve the symptoms of the menopause. It replaces hormones that typically drop to a lower level during the menopause.

Everyone experiences the menopause differently and symptoms vary. For some, the symptoms can be extremely debilitating and have a significant impact on their physical and psychological health, career, social life and relationships.

Data from a new study (2019) has confirmed that the risk of breast cancer is increased during, and after, the use of all types of HRT, except vaginal oestrogens. It also showed that the increased risk of breast cancer continues for longer after stopping HRT than previously thought.

This leaflet is to give you the key facts from the study, in order for you to consider the risks and benefits of using HRT with regards to breast cancer.

- The study confirms that people who use HRT for longer than a year have a higher risk of breast cancer than those who never use it.
- The risk of breast cancer falls after HRT is stopped, but remains higher for more than 10 years, compared to those who have never used HRT.
- HRT should be used at the **lowest dose, for the shortest length of time** needed to relieve menopause symptoms. This is because HRT increases the risk of some cancers, blood clots and strokes.
- Your exact increased risk will depend on what type of HRT you use and for how long. Breast cancer risk is higher for combined oestrogen-progestogen HRT than oestrogen alone.



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- For people who use HRT for similar lengths of time, the total of HRT related breast cancers by age 69 years, is similar, whether the HRT is started in their 40s or 50s.
 - Current and previous users of HRT should remain breast aware and report any new symptoms to their GP, plus, attend for National Breast Screening when invited.
 - The study found that vaginal oestrogen was the only form of HRT not linked to breast cancer risk. These products do not help with symptoms like hot flushes and night sweats.
 - If thinking about HRT for the first time, doctors will discuss your individual risk and options.
 - It is safe to stop HRT suddenly, but gradual reduction of treatment may reduce the chance of menopause symptoms returning.
 - HRT can reduce the risk of osteoporosis (weak bones) in the short term and improve muscle strength.

What can an individual do to reduce risk of breast cancer

- Using HRT for as short a period of time as possible, at the lowest dose that relieves their symptoms
- Remaining physically active, maintaining a healthy diet and weight (particularly after the menopause), not drinking alcohol and not smoking.

Useful links

NICE Menopause Guidance: [nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23)

Women's health concern: [womens-health-concern.org](https://www.womens-health-concern.org)

Menopause Matters: www.menopausematters.co.uk

Royal Osteoporosis Society: 0808 800 0035

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG

01225 428331 | www.ruh.nhs.uk

If

If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

Date of publication: 04/12/2023 | Ref: RUH BRU/027
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