

# Hormone Replacement Therapy

The big question is, should women take hormones or not? In light of the most recent research, the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) many women have quit taking their hormones. Symptoms without estrogen can include, hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, irritability, insomnia, depression, dry skin, vaginal dryness, decreased libido, painful intercourse, symptoms of urinary frequency and urgency, and changes in memory and concentration. Most women's symptoms will subside in six months to one year. However, there are some women in which these symptoms persist.

The WHI changed the paradigm of how both patient and health care provider should think about menopause. In the WHI the women were suppose to represent typical postmenopausal American women ages 50 to 79 inactive, over weight, and not receiving HR for menopausal symptoms. The WHI has made us realize that hormones do not protect against heart disease and Alzheimer's disease. We now have alternatives to treat bone loss and depression other than hormones. The real risks for HRT are for older women, not younger ones.

The WHI consisted of three groups of women. Women on estrogen only, women on placebo, and women on estrogen and a progestin. The part of the study with estrogen only women is still going on so we do not know the results. The estrogen and progestin group showed an increased risk for heart attacks and blood clots. The breast cancer risk was the same as in other studies. Women in the placebo group also experienced heart attacks and blood clots but not at the same interval.

The take-home message is the risks have to be put into perspective and weighed against the real quality of life issues. Use the lowest dose possible for the shortest duration possible. Consider alternatives, herbal remedies, antidepressants, and vitamins. See your doctor to determine what treatment, if needed, is best for your individual circumstance.

— *Mary Helen Tolentino, RN, WHNP-BC*

For more information go to [www.knowmenopause.com](http://www.knowmenopause.com) and meet a panel of women's health specialists who can help you learn some of the key things that are happening to your body during menopause.