



Visit your doctor to talk about your health and the medicines you may need. This factsheet will give you information about a type of medicine and what questions you should ask your doctor about this medicine. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is very important for your health.

Is it Safe to Take Hormones to Treat Menopause Symptoms?

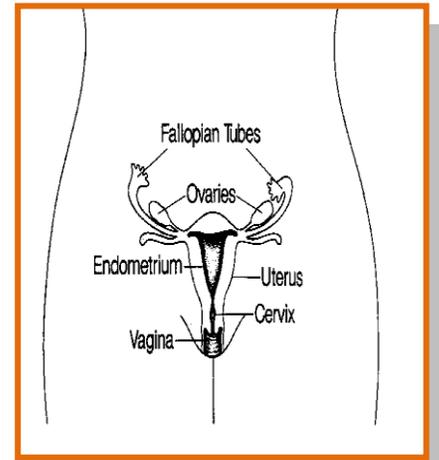
First, it is good to understand what hormones do. Hormones are chemicals that the body produces. They act like messengers. These messengers let the body know what it needs to do or not do.

Estrogen and **progesterone** are two hormones that a woman's ovaries produce. These hormones affect her body in many ways. For example, hormones make:

- the ovaries release an egg,
- the uterus ready for a pregnancy, or
- the woman have a menstrual period.

As a woman ages, her body begins to produce smaller amounts of estrogen and progesterone. This will make her go through several changes that lead to menopause. For example:

- Her period begins to change a lot from month-to-month.
- She may begin to have hot flashes.
- The menstrual period ends.
- Once a woman goes through menopause, she cannot get pregnant.



Menopause IS NOT a health condition that you need to treat. It is part of the aging process of a woman.



What symptoms can a woman have during menopause?

A woman may have:

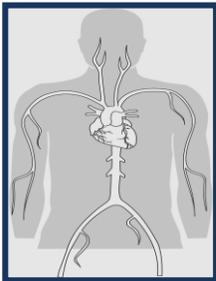
- **Hot flashes:** This is when you feel a strong heat on your face, chest, or under your skin. Your skin may have red blotches.
- **Night Sweats:** This happens while you sleep.
- **Trouble with your sleep:** It becomes difficult to stay asleep and to fall asleep again if you wake up.
- **Dryness in your vagina:** This can make having sex uncomfortable and even painful.

Over time these symptoms can go away or get better. Sometimes they can affect your quality of life. For this reason, many women decide to take hormone medicines to make the symptoms better or make them go away.



Are there risks for a woman taking hormone medicines?

If you take hormone medicines, you run the risk of:



- heart disease,
- heart attacks,
- blood clots, or
- strokes.

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health



To improve your mild symptoms you can:

- quit smoking;
- sleep in a cooler room;
- reduce your stress;
- exercise regularly; and
- drink fewer sodas or coffee.

Talk to your doctor about taking hormone medicines **only if your symptoms are very strong and are affecting your life;** and if:

- you are in your first 5 to 10 years of menopause; **AND**
- you do not have diabetes, high cholesterol, or high blood pressure; **AND**
- you do not have a high risk of heart disease in your family; **AND**
- you do not have heart disease, and have never had a stroke; **AND**
- you have not had breast, ovarian, or uterine cancer.

Keep these recommendations in mind when talking with your doctor about taking hormones:

- Take hormones for a short period of time and at the lowest amount possible.
- Tell your doctor everything about your medical history.
- Do not use hormones to treat changes in your mood, irritability, depression, anxiety, lack of memory, or if you are having difficulties learning.
- Do not use hormones to treat lack of interest in sex, urinating too often, or not being able to control it.
- Do not use hormones to treat back pain, chronic pain, joint pain, stiffness, or fatigue.

Hormone medicines DO NOT help these conditions and could make them worse.

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs evaluated the medicines to treat the symptoms of menopause by comparing how well they work, how safe they are, and their cost. *Consumer Reports* has chosen these hormone medicines as the best options. Some of these are generic and some are brand-name. They are:



In the United States, “generic” medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and work just like the brand-name medicine, and they cost a lot less money. Ask your doctor if you can get a generic medicine instead of a brand-name medicine.

Pills

- **Estradiol** (generic and brand-name **Gynodiol**)
- **Estropipate**
- **Medroxyprogesterone**
- **Menest**
- **Prefest**
- **Prempro**

Skin Patches:

- **Estradiol** (generic and brand-name **Estraderm**)
- **Climara Pro**
- **Combipatch**

Vaginal Cream:

- **Premarin**

Vaginal Ring:

- **FemRing**
- **Estring**

To learn more about this topic go to:

<http://www.consumerreports.org/health/best-buy-drugs/menopause.htm>



How to Get the Best Price for Your Medicines

- **Ask for a generic:** Tell your pharmacist you want a generic medicine instead of the brand-name. You will pay less for a generic. Not all brand-name medicines have a generic, but many do.
- **Compare prices:** Call or visit three different pharmacies. Give them the name of the medicine and ask how much it costs. Ask if they have a drug discount program that can help you pay less for your medicine. Buy your medicine from the pharmacy that gives you the cheapest price.
- **Sign up for patient assistance programs:** Most companies that make medicines have programs that help people that don't have a lot of money and do not have insurance to get brand-name medicines for free or at a low cost. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can help you find a program: www.pparx.org or 1-888-477-2669.

This series is produced by Consumer Reports and *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*, a public information project made possible by a grant from the States Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin. This brief should not be viewed as a substitute for a consultation with a medical or health professional. It is provided to enhance communication with your doctor, not replace it.