

What You Should Know About Transdermal Hormone Therapy

Menopause is a natural part of getting older. When a woman becomes menopausal, her body makes less estrogen and she stops having her period. The lack of estrogen causes some uncomfortable symptoms—such as hot flashes, mood swings, and night sweats. To counter these effects, some women decide to take hormone therapy.

What is hormone therapy?

Hormone therapy (HT) is a type of treatment that supplements the estrogen lost during menopause. It may help reduce hot flashes, and also may reduce the risk of osteoporosis and other conditions that can develop during menopause.

There are several ways HT can be taken, though 2 common methods are oral (taking pills or tablets) and transdermal (applying medication directly to the skin). Transdermal HT comes in several forms:

- Patch
- Gel
- Lotion
- Spray
- Vaginal cream
- Vaginal ring

Women who want to take HT but who are concerned about the risks of oral estrogen may want to consider transdermal HT. Transdermal HT may also be a good choice for women who do not like taking pills or who cannot swallow pills.

What are the differences between oral HT and transdermal HT?

Because oral HT is swallowed, your body needs to process it before the estrogen gets into your bloodstream. Your liver plays an important role in processing oral medication. In order to make sure enough hormones are present after your liver processes the medication, oral medication usually has larger doses of hormones than transdermal HT.

It is safest to take HT in small doses for the shortest amount of time needed to treat your symptoms. Because transdermal HT is delivered directly to the bloodstream through your skin, your body does not have



to process the medication. Transdermal HT thus has lower doses of estrogen. Because it is quickly transferred to the bloodstream, transdermal HT releases hormones in your body evenly and over a period of time. Compared with oral HT, transdermal HT may also have a lower risk of causing blood clots and some other conditions.

What else should I know about HT?

There are some risks with any HT (oral or transdermal), including an increased risk of breast cancer and other conditions. Women with breast cancer or heart disease should not take HT for menopausal symptoms.

Because every woman's menopausal symptoms and health risks are different, it is best to talk with your health care professional about HT. Depending on your symptoms or concerns, transdermal therapy may be the best method for you. HT-related research is ongoing, so experts may have new or different recommendations in the future. To be sure you are getting the best individualized treatment, you should discuss HT with your health care professional throughout your menopausal years.