

Hormone Replacement Therapy or HRT helps to relieve the symptoms that some women experience during the change of life – the menopause. For example, hot flushes, tiredness, headaches and irritable moods. If it is used for several years, HRT can also help protect against bone loss, heart disease, strokes and Alzheimers disease.

### How does it work?

HRT replaces the Oestrogen that your body stops producing during the change and so restores its natural balance. This means that women who have not had a hysterectomy will continue to have a monthly bleed. Although this may be inconvenient it does show that HRT is working.

### Will it work immediately?

It usually takes two or three weeks before any benefits are felt. It may also take your body several months to get used to HRT. For example, you may experience breast tenderness for a while, as your body gets used to having these hormones back again. This often disappears as you keep taking HRT. However, it is a good idea to see your doctor again after taking HRT for three months to let him/her know how you are feeling.

### What if it does not work?

If you are still getting symptoms after 3 months of HRT then you may need to have the therapy adjusted. Because each woman's body is different, the therapy may need to be altered to suit your particular requirements. It is a bit like choosing a dress, trying it on and then having it altered here and there to make it fit perfectly. So, if your symptoms continue or you have a monthly bleed sooner than you expect, and then consult your doctor. It may help your doctor if you make a note in your diary when you bleed and when you start a new HRT pack. The doctor may decide to change the type or amount of HRT you are using to control your particular symptoms more effectively. You may be given a chart to fill in each day to help your doctor get your HRT absolutely right for your personal needs.

### Has HRT any long term benefits?

As well as controlling your menopausal symptoms, HRT has a beneficial effect in the future. HRT helps significantly to protect against heart disease and strokes. Women receiving HRT are less likely to suffer from brittle bones (osteoporosis) in later years. This reduces your chance of suffering hip or wrist fractures as you get older.

### When should I take HRT?

Remember to take your HRT when your doctor tells you, not just when you have the symptoms of the menopause. Because the tablets contain only very small amounts of hormone they have to be taken each day in order to stop the symptoms from starting again. As with other medicines, always keep your HRT out of the reach of children and never give it to other people – even if their symptoms are like yours – as it was designed specifically for you.

## **Does HRT cause Breast Cancer?**

The long term use of HRT may be associated with a small increase in the number of cases of Breast Cancer; however, overall, women on HRT are likely to live longer than women who do not take HRT.

## **Does HRT cause Deep Venous Thrombosis?**

Recent studies have shown a small increase in the risk of Venous Thromboebolism in women on oestrogen containing HRT.

### *References*

*Breast Cancer- Banal V, Banks E, Reeves G, Applely P. Use of HRT and subsequent risk of cancer. Journal of Epidemiology and Biostatics 1999. 4 (3) 191 – 210*

*DVT- RCOG Guideline 19, April 1999*