

Hormone Replacement Therapy and Risk of Breast Cancer

Reviewed 12/09/19

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is used to relieve symptoms of the menopause, it should be used at the **lowest dose (amount) for the shortest amount of time** needed to relieve symptoms. This is because HRT increases the chance (risk) of some cancers and of having blood clots or stroke.

A new study has confirmed that women who use HRT for longer than 1 year have a higher risk of breast cancer than women who never use HRT. The risk of breast cancer falls after HRT is stopped but some increased risk remains for more than 10 years compared to women who have never used HRT. The increased risk of breast cancer is seen with **all types of HRT**, except for topical HRT applied directly into the vagina.

What is my risk of breast cancer?

Your overall risk of breast cancer will depend on many things. Other factors that increase risk of breast cancer include smoking, family history, alcohol use, and obesity. The new study showed that an increased risk of breast cancer with HRT is similar whether HRT is taken orally (swallowed) or delivered via patches or gels or implants.

In the UK about 1 in 16 women who never use HRT are diagnosed with breast cancer between the ages of 50 and 69 years. Over the same period (ages 50–69 years), with 5 years of HRT use, the study estimated:

Difference in breast cancer incidence per 1,000 women aged 50-69

Approximate number of women developing breast cancer with 5 year-HRT use

63 cases of breast cancer diagnosed in the UK general population



An additional five cases in women using estrogen-only HRT



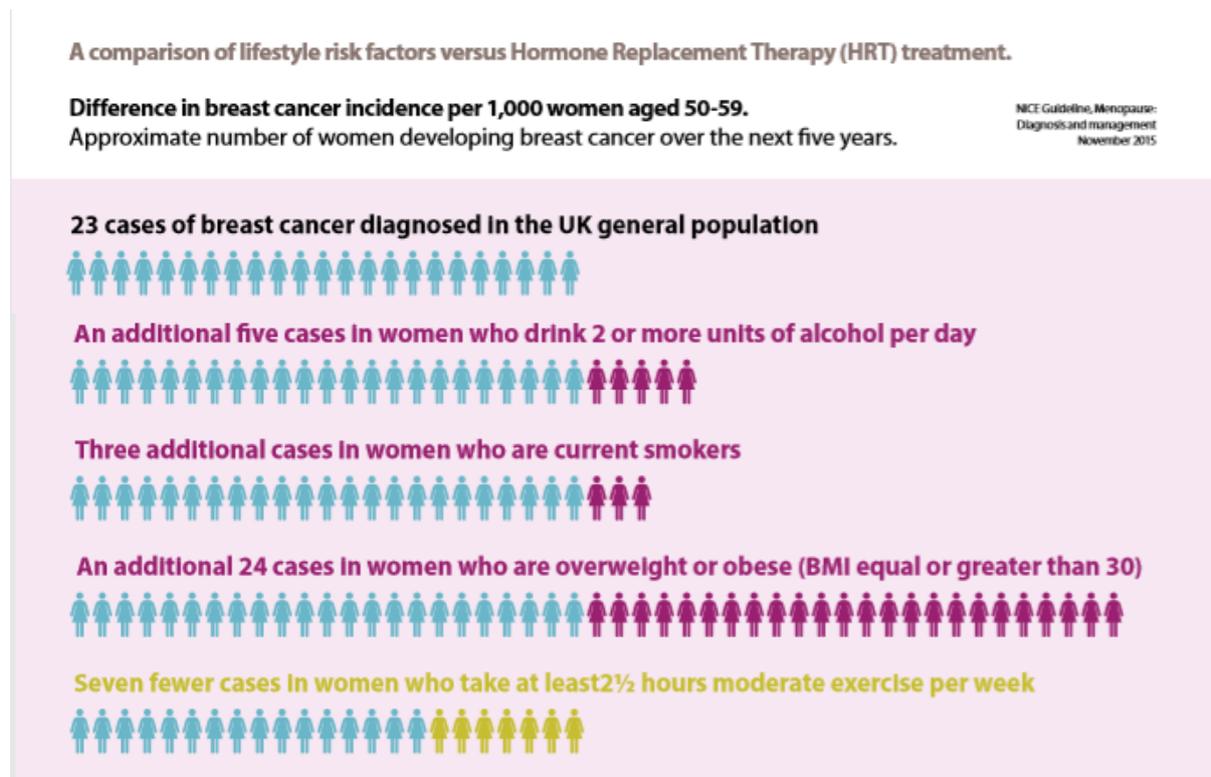
Fourteen additional cases in women using estrogen combined with progesterone for part of each month



An additional 20 cases in women using estrogen combined with daily progesterone



How does the risk associated with HRT compare to other lifestyle risk factors?



Why has the information changed?

An increased risk of breast cancer with HRT has been known for some time. The amount of information available about the risks has increased as more women have been followed up who used HRT and then stopped. The new study measured how many cases of breast cancer occurred in women who never used HRT and in women who used HRT, then stopped.

What will happen if I stop HRT?

No medical harms are associated with stopping HRT and you can stop it without seeing a healthcare professional. However, stopping gradually may help to prevent symptoms of the menopause from coming back.

Further information can be found at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d68d0e340f0b607c6dcb697/HRT-patient-sheet-3008.pdf>

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the practice and book an appointment with a nurse to discuss this further.