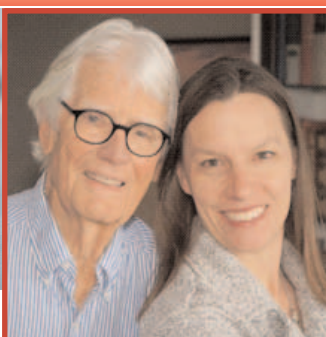


HEALTH CORNER



The Doctor Game Early Hormone Therapy Has Benefits

By Common Sense Health - W. Gifford-Jones MD and Diana Gifford

It was surprising news in the Canadian Medical Association Journal. There's another about-turn among scientists studying hormone therapy (HT) as a treatment for symptoms of menopause. This time, researchers have produced findings that suggest benefits to healthy women who start HT early in

the transition to menopause.

Women have long been perplexed by conflicting advice on hormone replacement, and this new study doesn't offer universal guidance. The bottom line remains, HT is a complicated business, requiring patients and doctors to weigh many factors in deciding for or against. Dr. Iliana Lega of the Women's College Hospital and the University of Toronto has this to say, "Menopausal hormone therapy is the first line treatment of symptoms in the absence of contraindications." That clarity may be overly simplified, and she adds that patients and doctors need to consider symptoms before and during menopause and to discuss treatments based on personal preferences and potential risk factors.

Those risk factors have been well publicized. Many studies have suggested leaning away from HT due to associated increased risk of breast cancer, stroke, and cardiovascular disease. But new findings offer important insights for younger women.

Previous studies have shown an increased risk of breast cancer in women taking HT. However, this new study reports the risk is much lower in people aged 50-59 years and in those who start HRT in the first 10 years of menopause.

Increased risk of ischemic stroke (blood clot) has been a concern for women older than 60 years who start HT 10 years after the start of menopause. But new findings suggest the risk is reduced for those younger than sixty.

Furthermore, data from the Women's Health Initiative trial show a possible reduction in coronary artery disease with HT among younger menopausal patients, specifically those who start HT before 60 years of age or within 10 years of the start of menopause.

Be sure to discuss the issues with your surgeon if you are scheduled for a hysterectomy. Leaving ovaries in place can preserve natural estrogen function for a time. But removal of ovaries and use of HT eliminates any future risk of ovarian cancer. Of course, most saved ovaries do not develop a malignancy. So, sparing one or both ovaries in younger patients should be a matter for discussion.

There are other benefits of hormone therapy in the treatment of menopausal symptoms. Reducing the severity of hot flashes is the main one. Another is reduced fragility, with one large study involving over 25,000 women aged 50-79 showing that HT reduced the risk of any fracture by 28 percent, a major osteoporotic fracture by 40 percent, and a hip fracture by 34 percent. HT can also offer relief from mood swings, vaginal dryness, and joint pain.

The cognitive effects of HT are debated. Past research questioned the impact on risk for dementia. Other research found benefits including reduced "brain fog" and reduced risk of Alzheimer's.

Dr. Pauline Maki is a specialist in menopause and cognition in the department of Psychiatry and Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She notes, "Women who initiate hormone therapy before their final menstrual period show increased blood flow to the hippocampus and better verbal memory compared to nonusers."

The message is that "timing is everything" in decisions around hormone therapy.

That's not easy to action given menopause may begin up to 10 years before the last menstrual period and can last more than 10 years. For some women, the symptoms are intense. Others never know the menopause has come and gone.

So get informed guidance from your doctor and start the discussion early.

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Direct Answers
from Wayne & Tamara

Pride Goeth...

My boyfriend's daughter (I'll call her Mary) got married six months ago. She is 19 and pregnant. My boyfriend (I'll call him John) didn't go to the wedding because he disapproved of her husband and the marriage.

The reason he gave for not attending was it would make him a hypocrite in front of his other children if he went. This caused a huge rift between John and Mary, and they have not spoken since the wedding. Before this, they were very close, talking almost every day.

Mary's baby is due any day now. I told Mary it would be a shame not to allow her baby a chance to know its grandfather. She said John could see the baby if he wanted, but she is unwilling to make the first move.

I talked to John this morning and told him I think they are both stubborn as donkeys. John is firm in his stance, saying it is a matter of principle. He says by not compromising, he is able to sleep at night. I am not sure John is using the term "principle" correctly, since I don't understand what principle this involves.

The dictionary defines a principle as a rule of conduct, or something which is important. In my opinion, establishing communication with Mary wouldn't compromise his principles, since it seems his objective was not alienating his daughter but boycotting the wedding. Is there some principle involved here?

Trina

Trina, when you are a parent, all you can do is get your children to a certain point. After that, they are on their own. Parents are not like pear trees, putting out only pear seeds. Humans are free to follow a different course. Wisely or not, Mary can decide who she marries.

She married a man John dislikes, and she is pregnant. That's a fact, not a principle. As a parent, John punished Mary by not attending the wedding. It was a harsh punishment. Girls dream of walking down the aisle on their father's arm, and Mary has no wedding pictures with her dad in them.

After you punish a child, you move on. You don't punish them again and again for the same offense. Whatever John's pride required should have been satisfied. All the rest is revenge. The only principle here is anger. John is angry his authority over Mary was undermined.

For the sake of vanity, he is ready to create a permanent rift in the family. On birthdays, holidays and other occasions, the family won't be together as a unit, and in a short time, the repercussions of his actions may be too far advanced to reverse.

If John cannot behave himself around Mary and her husband, it is best not to be around them. But the principle he violates is placing pride above love.

Wayne & Tamara

Looking Forward

I am involved in a relationship for the past seven years. Recently I asked my partner what his future plans are for us. His answer was, "I don't know." Am I wasting my time?

Nadine

Nadine, if you have to approach the topic of marriage so gingerly, you already know the answer. If your partner wanted to make things permanent, you wouldn't need to ask.

It's hard to walk away from a casino table when you've been losing. You naturally want to win back what you've lost. You lost three years, then four, and now seven. It's time to walk away. He's had the benefits, and you've taken the loss. He hasn't given you the one thing you want. Chances are he has known for a long time he doesn't want to make you his wife. You will learn a lesson if you end this relationship on your own terms. You will have learned not to let things drag on with someone who doesn't have those feelings which add up to marriage.

Wayne & Tamara Write: Directanswers@WayneAndTamara.com

Wayne & Tamara are also the authors of *Cheating in a Nutshell, What Infidelity Does to the Victim*, available from Amazon, Apple and most booksellers.

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