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STEAM

VA Strategies to Educate and Address Menopause

Newsletter



MyHealthVet to Enable And Negotiate for Shared Decision Making

Miami VA
Healthcare System
★★★★★

August 2015

Menopause and Hormone Therapy

What is hormone therapy?

After menopause, a woman's body produces less female hormones (estrogen and progesterone). Hormone therapy replaces these hormones and can help with some symptoms of menopause, such as:

- hot flashes and night sweats
- poor sleep and irritability
- vaginal dryness and discomfort
- pain during sex
- mood swings and depression

Risks of hormone therapy include :

- blood clots
- heart attack
- stroke
- breast cancer
- gall bladder disease

Women should not consider any form of hormone therapy if they:

- may be pregnant
- have vaginal bleeding
- have had certain types of cancers (such as breast and uterine cancer)
- have had a stroke or heart attack
- have had blood clots
- have liver disease
- have heart disease

What routes of administration are there for hormone therapy?

- Tablets
- IUDs
- Patch
- Vaginal Rings
- Creams
- Injection (rare)

Guidelines from the North American Menopause Society state that hormone therapy may be appropriate to relieve severe menopausal symptoms in some women, and that its use should be based on the particular risk and benefit for each woman.

Hormone therapy should be used in the lowest dose that relieves symptoms and for the shortest period of time. Some preparations are chemically similar to human hormones (estradiol), but some are not (such as estrogen from soy or progesterone from yams). Soy-based hormones and other plant-based or bioidentical hormones have estrogens. For that reason they should not be considered safer or more effective than traditional hormone therapy.

What types of hormone therapy for menopause are available?

Traditional Hormone Therapy

There are many forms of FDA-approved hormones (tablets, patches, gels, creams) for women who struggle with menopausal symptoms. Products are available in many doses and can contain only estrogen, only a progestogen, or a combination of both. Hormones can be created in a lab or found in nature (such as estrogen from soy or from a pregnant mare).

FDA-Approved Bioidentical Hormones

Bioidentical hormones are plant-derived hormones that are chemically similar to those produced by the body. Some products are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but others are not. When people think of bioidentical hormones, "*compounded bioidentical hormones*" is what comes to mind.

Compounded Bioidentical Hormones

Compounding pharmacies make hormonal preparations according to a health-care provider's specific instructions. Many use the term "bioidentical hormone" to imply that these preparations are natural or the same as human hormones, and thus, are safe. Medical organizations and the FDA have determined that this is a "*marketing*" phrase and is not based on scientific evidence.

All information in this issue can be found on:

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3127562

www.menopause.org/publications/clinical-practice-materials/bioidentical-hormone-therapy/compounded-bioidentical-hormones-what's-the-harm-

www.womenshealth.gov

For more information on hormone therapies and menopause please visit our websites at:

www.menopause.varesearchfoundation.com

www.miami.va.gov/menopause

More on compounded bioidentical hormones

When taken properly, prescribed by a well respected physician and compounded by a reputable pharmacy, this form of hormone therapy may be helpful in relieving symptoms associated with menopause. Medications made by compounding pharmacists have not gone through the rigorous testing and quality control that FDA-approved medications go through to make sure they are effective and safe. Because compounded pharmacies do not follow FDA regulations, there is no way of knowing that what they say is in the preparation is what is really in there. On the other hand, FDA-approved medications can assure you that what is on the label is what you are taking. For those reasons, there is no guarantee that compounded hormones will be absorbed into the body the way they should, that women will benefit from them, that there will be no side effects, or that they are safe and free of contamination.

The problem with compounded bioidentical hormones begins with the testing. You might feel confident and more assured if your doctor tests your hormone levels to see which ones are low and then prescribes you a dose to put you back at the ideal level. In theory, this is a good idea. Unfortunately, it is not that simple since a woman's hormone levels change constantly - even hourly. Finally, the saliva tests that are often used by compounding doctors do not necessarily reflect the blood hormone levels. Hormone levels in saliva can change depending on the foods you eat or the bacteria in your mouth.

VA Links

www.myhealth.va.gov

This is the link to the My HealthVet page. There you can learn all the ways it can help you stay connected to your healthcare team, how to enroll, reorder medications, etc.

Once enrolled in the My HealthVet you can participate in our MEANS program.

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WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

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As of August 1st, the Miami VHAS has a new provider dedicated exclusively to women's health



Dr. Joslyn Wiley

Dr. Joslyn Wiley offers primary care services to women Veterans at our Women's Health clinic at the Bruce W. Carter Medical Center

For appointments, call 305-575-7000, extension 7001