

# Types of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) isn't a 'one size fits all' treatment – the type and dosage given will vary according to your needs. There are about 50 different combinations available, which can be taken in various ways: as a tablet that you swallow, a skin patch (like a plaster), or a gel or spray that you rub into your arms, thighs or tummy.

The type of HRT that you can take will depend on your overall health and your risk factors for other conditions, for example whether you've ever had a clot, or have had certain types of cancer. Oestrogen is also available as a cream, a vaginal tablet or a ring for vaginal or urinary symptoms.

If you still have a womb, you will also need to take progesterone, which is available as a tablet that you swallow, and also as a coil. This is useful if you are still having periods and need contraception.

Tablets and patches that combine oestrogen and progesterone are also available, but these give you less flexibility to adjust your oestrogen dosage. If you have a history of clots, migraine, diabetes or liver disease you can still take HRT, but you will most likely be advised to use a patch or gel. This means that the oestrogen is absorbed through the skin, and bypasses the liver.

## How to take HRT

The way you take HRT depends on whether or not you are still having periods. If you are, you will be prescribed cyclical HRT, which means you will still have a regular bleed. This isn't quite the same as a period – it happens because the progesterone causes the lining of the womb to shed.

There are two ways to take HRT:

- Monthly: You take oestrogen every day, and progesterone for a set number of days at the end of the month, so that you have a monthly bleed
- Continuous: If you haven't had a period for a year, or have been taking cyclical HRT for at least a year, it's more likely that you will be prescribed continuous combined HRT. This means you will take oestrogen and progesterone every day without a break – and you won't have a monthly bleed.

If, after a few months of taking HRT, your doctor thinks that you would benefit from testosterone, you may be prescribed this as a cream called AndroFeme®. You will need to rub a pea size amount into your skin each day, usually on your outer thigh or tummy, so that it can be absorbed straight into your bloodstream. Alternatively, some women may be prescribed testosterone as a gel or implant.

When you start taking HRT, you should notice that your symptoms begin to improve within one to three months. If you don't start to feel better, or your symptoms return, this is usually a sign that you need to adjust your dosage, or try a different type of HRT.