

Breast Cancer and Bioidentical Hormones - Part 1



By: Frank Nuber RPh.

When most women I talk with hear the phrase, "hormone replacement therapy," the thought alone sends a shiver of fear down their spines. With so much misinformation floating around, women are confused. One day the media is reporting that hormone therapy is the fountain of youth, and the next day, they're telling women they should avoid hormones like the plague. Frequently, I'm asked, "which is it, fountain of youth or the plague?"

The answer hinges upon the differences between bioidentical hormones and synthetic hormones, including animal derived ones like Premarin and Prempro. The key difference is in the chemical composition of the hormone. Bioidentical hormones are an *identical molecular match* to the hormones produced by your body. Synthetic hormones are manufactured in a lab. The chemical composition is changed from what nature intended in order to make synthetic hormones patentable. It's generally acknowledged in the medical community that synthetic hormones may have a host of unpleasant side effects, which can manifest at any time during use.

Every day I'm asked by breast cancer surviving women, if they can take these hormones and what the risks are given their medical history. To answer these questions, it's helpful to first understand where the misinformation about hormone therapy (HRT) originated.

Misinformation began with the findings of a study conducted by

the National Institute of Health (NIH) called the *Women's Health Initiative* (WHI). The study included 161,000 menopausal women who were either given Prempro or a sugar pill called a placebo. Bioidentical hormones (BHRT) were not included in this study. The initial results were so shocking that the study was stopped three years early. Instead of proving the health benefits of synthetic hormone replacement therapy as the pharmaceutical companies had been touting for years, the study exposed the risks of taking Prempro; risks that far outweighed any potential benefit. The Prempro group had a:

- 26% increase in breast cancer
- 41% increase in strokes
- 22% increase in cardiovascular disease

Many doctors, upon learning these results, immediately took women off all hormones, whether Bioidentical or synthetic. The media compounded the confusion as they collectively referred to both BHRT and Prempro as "hormones."

With all this confusion about synthetic versus bioidentical hormones, women, especially those who've experienced breast cancer have suffered needlessly with menopausal symptoms. Contrary to what your doctor may have told you, relief from your symptoms is still possible, safe and will improve your quality of life *without increasing your risk of breast cancer.*

Estriol is a type of estrogen that has been used clinically in many countries, including the U.S., for at least 50 years. It's the estrogen of choice in many European countries

and in Japan. A great reference on this can be found in book by Dr. John Lee, Virginia Hopkins and David Zava titled, *What Your Dr May Not Tell You about Breast Cancer; How Hormone Balance May Save Your Life.*

A Swedish study investigated how using different types of HRT affects the risk of ductal, lobular and tubular breast cancers. Ductal cancers are much more common than lobular or tubular cancers. This study was unusual because it looked at Estriol therapy in isolation, separating it from the other hormone therapies. They discovered that Estriol, an estrogen hormone produced by our bodies, had risk factors that are much lower than other forms of HRT, such as estradiol, another naturally occurring estrogen. One of the findings of this research is that women who make more Estriol have lower rates of breast cancer as compared to women who had higher levels of estradiol than Estriol. Japan, which has a lower incidence of breast cancer, has a female population which makes more Estriol relative to estradiol, and has lower overall estradiol levels.

It's not surprising that Estriol is protective of the human genome. At its highest in women during pregnancy, (increasing one-thousand-fold), Estriol peaks just before birth. I find that using Estriol in many cases, and not estradiol, has protective effects and is very effective for calming those night sweats and hot flashes. Used in conjunction with Bioidentical progesterone, many find relief from menopausal symptoms.

Space doesn't permit me to include all of the information I want to share, so I'll have to continue this next time. Also if you'd like to see some of the studies I've referenced, you can find them on my website at www.excelapothecary.com/news_1.html. You can find additional links under resources.

If you've survived breast cancer, you don't have to live in fear or suffer from symptoms of menopause; you can have an improved quality of life and not increase your risk.



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