



# spotlight on health

## Alternatives To Hormone Replacement Therapy

(NAPSA)—Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or no hormone replacement therapy? That is the dilemma facing many women after recent studies raised questions about the beneficial effects of the therapy. Fortunately, alternatives exist to help women cope with not only the bothersome side effects of menopause, but also more serious women's health issues.

"Hormone replacement therapy certainly addresses the typical symptoms of menopause, such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness and difficulty sleeping," said Rite Aid Pharmacist Sarah Matunis, R.Ph. "The thought over the years, however, was that HRT also helped prevent other conditions, especially cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and cancer. The new studies are questioning this and making women and their doctors reevaluate whether the benefits of HRT outweigh the potential risks."

For women using HRT to address only menopausal symptoms, the treatment—at least over the short-term—may do just that. Women using the therapy as a preventive measure, however, may want to consider the many alternatives available to them. Both groups should seek the advice of their doctors before making any changes to their current treatment plan.

### Evaluating the Alternatives

Women using HRT to prevent heart disease have drug and lifestyle options available should they choose to discontinue the therapy. Lipid-lowering drugs, daily aspirin therapy and ACE inhibitors for lowering blood pressure are good alternatives for a woman to discuss with her doctor. Lifestyle choices that also can contribute to heart health include eating a good diet, increasing physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight. In addition, a woman should stop smoking, control her blood pressure and cholesterol levels and, if applicable, control her diabetes.

There are numerous prescription drugs available today for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. Raloxifene (brand name Evista®), alendronate (FOSAMAX®), risedronate (ACTONEL®) and calcitonin (Miacalcin® and Calcimar®) will prevent bone loss and strengthen the bones.



A woman also can help avoid brittle bones by ingesting 1,200 milligrams of elemental calcium and 400 to 800 IUs of Vitamin D each day through diet or supplements. Vitamin D helps the body to absorb calcium. Foods high in calcium are dairy products and dark green leafy vegetables, while Vitamin D can be found in milk and other dairy products. In addition, most women may be surprised to learn that weight-bearing exercises, such as walking, can stimulate and strengthen bones.

"For women who need to simply alleviate the symptoms of menopause, the good news is that there are alternatives to prescription estrogen," said Matunis. "Soy may control hot flashes because it acts like estrogen. The verdict is still out, however, on soy's effectiveness for vaginal dryness and other symptoms."

Matunis adds that black cohosh, an herb, is also in the spotlight as an option to treat menopausal symptoms like hot flashes. The recommended dose is 20 to 80 milligrams twice daily.

"A lot of women, when they first saw the news about the HRT studies, immediately said 'I'm done with HRT,'" said Matunis. "That may or may not be necessary, depending upon why a woman is on HRT." If the decision is to stop, in most cases there are alternative treatments available that a woman should consider with input from her doctor. According to Matunis, Rite Aid pharmacists are also trained to help educate women on alternatives and help them to consider these choices.

For more information or to find a nearby Rite Aid pharmacist, go to [www.riteaid.com](http://www.riteaid.com).