

real risks

A new study on hormone replacement therapy may have more women thinking twice about the drug

BY ART HISTER



Researchers found that HRT not only didn't help menopausal women much, it also had huge potential drawbacks

Although I wrote about the issue of hormone replacement therapy or HRT some months ago, I've decided to address it again, despite my editor imploring me to "for God's sake, pick something new." She's young, so she doesn't yet know that there's nothing new under the sun.

But the reasons for this

early re-uptake of an old topic are really twofold. First, given that nearly all my readers are average Canadians beyond the age of 20 (if you're a kid and you regularly read this health column, kid, you need a life). And second, I'm sure that fewer than 0.0001 per cent of you remember even one word of what I wrote back then. If you're like me, most of you probably can't even remember where you put

your shoes when you came home tonight.

More importantly, though, is that a recent item about HRT flashed across my computer and I think it's worth bringing up. Especially since Canadian gynecologists (through a website of their official organization, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada) seem to be, if not exactly "promoting" the use of short-term HRT for the treatment of severe

drawbacks — including the problem that worries most women the most: a significantly higher risk of breast cancer.

So, soon after these results were published, the use of HRT plummeted, especially of course, in women who were most likely to use it: educated, well-off white women. In other words, precisely the kind of women who predominate in upscale Marin County near San Francisco.

Anyway, what a recent study has found is that in

menopause symptoms, then at the very least they're downplaying some of the valid concerns women have about the therapy.

But to start, a bit of compulsory history. HRT was used widely by menopausal women for several years towards the end of the last century and early into this one, but fell rapidly into disfavour in 2002 when a major study on HRT was released. In fact, it was the only large-enough good study on the issue, and it found that HRT not only didn't help menopausal women much, but far more importantly, it also had several huge potential

the short period of time after sales of hormones had dropped precipitously in Marin County, the rate of breast cancer also plummeted. A drop that the researchers attribute entirely to the fact that the women of Marin County, well read and determined, stopped their use of hormones nearly instantly when the study results came out.

Similar results have been found in other areas of the U.S., but this one seems to be especially dramatic because the demographic base looked at here is so uniform. ■

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