

## **HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT) AND BREAST CANCER – IMPORTANT NEW INFORMATION**

You may have seen in the news that a large study in the UK, the Million Women Study, has just published its results on the risk of breast cancer with various types of HRT. This study shows that the level of risk associated with use of combined (oestrogen plus progestogen) HRT products is substantially higher than previously thought. If, after reading the information below, you are concerned, make a routine appointment to see your doctor.

### **Use of HRT**

In the UK, HRT products are licensed for helping relieve the unpleasant symptoms of the menopause, including hot flushes, vaginal dryness and night sweats. Some HRT products are also licensed for the longer-term prevention of osteoporosis, which can cause bone fractures.

### **Million Women Study findings**

This study looked at the effect of different types of HRT on the risk of breast cancer in nearly a million postmenopausal women in the UK. The results confirm that oestrogen-only HRT causes a small increase in the risk of breast cancer. Combined (oestrogen plus progestogen) HRT products were shown to increase the risk of breast cancer more than oestrogen-only therapy.

For oestrogen-only products, an extra 1-2 cases of breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed per 1000 women after 5 years of use and an extra 5 cases per 1000 women after 10 years of use, compared to women not using HRT. For combined HRT an extra 6 cases of breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed per 1000 women after 5 years of using combined HRT and an extra 19 cases per 1000 women after 10 years, compared to women not using HRT.

This study also shows that the use of tibolone (Livial® - a different type of HRT product) increases the risk of breast cancer compared to not using HRT. However, the risk is not as high as with combined HRT.

The longer HRT is used, the higher the risk of breast cancer.

**In all cases, the risk of breast cancer begins to decline when HRT is stopped and by 5 years reaches the same level as in women who have never taken HRT.**

### **Take home message**

This new study confirms what we already knew about the risk of breast cancer with oestrogen-only preparations and provides important new information about the risk with combined HRT and tibolone. If you are concerned about this information, make a routine appointment to see your doctor. These new results may present you and your doctor with a dilemma about your HRT treatment. It is important that you note any changes with your breasts and, if you are 50 or over, attend for breast screening (for further information see [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen/breastawareness.html](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen/breastawareness.html)).

### **Further information**

Further information and advice may be found on the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's website ([www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk)). Here you can find more details about the other risks and benefits of HRT treatment, which may help to answer some of the questions you may have about these new findings.

NHS Direct may also be able to answer your questions (Tel 0845 4647).