

## **USE OF HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT) IN THE PREVENTION OF OSTEOPOROSIS: IMPORTANT NEW INFORMATION**

You may have seen in the news that European experts, including the UK, have recommended that HRT should no longer be used as a first choice for the prevention of osteoporosis. This recommendation follows a European-wide review of all the risks and benefits of HRT and affects all EU countries, including the UK. If, after reading the information below, you are concerned, you should make a **routine** appointment to see your doctor. There is no need for any urgent changes to treatment.

### **Use of HRT**

In the UK, 'conventional' HRT products (containing either oestrogen alone or in combination with a progestogen) are licensed for helping relieve unpleasant symptoms of the menopause, including hot flushes, vaginal dryness and night sweats. Some of these products are also licensed for longer-term use for preventing osteoporosis, which can cause bone fractures.

### **Further Review of the Risks and Benefits of HRT**

Recent publications (such as the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) and the UK Million Women Study) have highlighted a number of safety concerns regarding long-term use of HRT. As a result, a group of experts on HRT from a number of European countries, including the UK, has now reassessed all the risks and benefits of HRT and provided new recommendations about its use. The conclusions of the review are that:

- For short-term treatment of menopausal symptoms the balance of risks and benefits is favourable - HRT therefore remains a suitable treatment option. The minimum effective dose should be used for the shortest duration.
- For long-term use for preventing osteoporosis the balance of risks and benefits is unfavourable. HRT should only be used for preventing osteoporosis by those who are unable to take other osteoporosis prevention treatments or for whom other treatments have been unsuccessful.
- In healthy women without symptoms, the balance of risks and benefits is generally unfavourable and HRT is not recommended.

### **Key message**

- There is no need to contact your doctor urgently.
- There is no need to change your treatment if you are taking HRT in the short-term for the relief of menopausal symptoms, but you should discuss your treatment with your doctor (at least annually) to make sure that it is still right for you.
- If you are aged 50 or more, taking HRT for the prevention of osteoporosis (and are not suffering from menopausal symptoms) you should make a routine appointment with your doctor to discuss whether an alternative might be more suitable.
- There is no need to change your HRT therapy if you have experienced an early menopause, and are not yet 50 years old. Your therapy should be reviewed regularly and your doctor might advise a change in therapy when you are about 50 years of age.
- If in doubt, make a routine appointment to see your doctor.

### **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).

Information is also available on the website of the European Medicines Evaluation Agency ([www.emea.eu.int](http://www.emea.eu.int)) and the Heads of European Medicines Regulatory Agencies website (<http://heads.medagencies.org>).