



Our Recommendations

Taking medicines that contain the female hormones estrogen and progesterin to treat the symptoms of menopause has become complex in the wake of several important studies released between 2002 and 2005. The studies show that the hormones increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and some cancers (notably breast cancer). As a result, doctors now prescribe them far more cautiously. There are many products in this class. They include pills, skin patches, skin creams and gels, and vaginal creams and ring inserts. Some contain only estrogen, some contain both estrogen and progesterin, and some contain only progesterin. (See our recommendations.)

To help you and your doctor choose the best medicine if you have moderate to severe menopausal symptoms, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This two-page brief is a summary of a 21-page report you can access at CRBestBuyDrugs.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

DO YOU NEED A HORMONE DRUG?

About 70 percent of women will have some menopausal symptoms (see the table below). But only about 20 percent of them will have severe symptoms. You and your doctor may consider hormone treatment if your symptoms are moderate to severe. Whether your doctor prescribes a hormone for you will also depend on your medical history and in particular your risk factors for heart disease and cancer.

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Is menopause to blame?

The main symptoms of menopause	Symptoms not clearly linked to menopause
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot flashes and flushing - Sensation of intense heat on your face, chest, or over the surface of your body. You may also perspire or feel chilled or faint. • Night sweats - Hot flashes that occur at night. • Sleep disturbances - Awaken more easily, sleep more lightly, or cannot get back to sleep easily once you awaken. • Vaginal dryness - Lack of vaginal lubrication because of reduced estrogen. Intercourse can be uncomfortable and even painful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety, fatigue - May be secondary to the symptoms in column 1. For example, days on end of poor sleep may trigger them. • Reduced libido - May be secondary to vaginal dryness and pain on intercourse. • Mental lapses, forgetfulness, and cognitive difficulties - These increase as we get older. Men experience them, too. • Urinary incontinence - Hormone treatment may actually increase the risk. • Weight gain - It's common as we age. Distribution of fat may also shift.

Medicines containing estrogen and/or progesterin are highly effective (70 to 90 percent) at reducing the symptoms of menopause. But they increase the risk of heart disease, breast cancer, blood clots, stroke, urinary incontinence, and dementia—and so must be prescribed with extreme caution.

Generally, if your menopausal symptoms are mild and manageable with lifestyle changes and adjustments, you should not take a hormone drug. Likewise, if you have heart disease, or have had a stroke or cancer of the breast, ovaries or uterus—or at elevated risk of these—you should not take hormones. Hormones also should never be used to treat the conditions listed in column two of the table below.

If your menopausal symptoms are severe and interrupt normal living, hormone treatment might provide relief. Take the lowest dose possible for the shortest duration possible. The risks associated with such use appear to be quite low, but definitive studies on that are not yet complete.

If you have an intact uterus (no hysterectomy), you must take both estrogen and progesterin; estrogen-only drugs will put you at higher risk of cancer of the uterine lining (endometrial cancer).

No one form of estrogen or estrogen plus progesterin is more effective than any other. Taking effectiveness, safety, the choice for mode of delivery, and cost into account, we have chosen the following as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* for the treatment of menopausal symptoms:

- Generic estradiol pills
- Gynodiol pills (estradiol)
- Estratab or Menest pills (esterified estrogen)
- Generic medroxyprogesterone pills (when a progesterin is needed)
- Generic estradiol patch
- Alora patch (estradiol)
- Vivelle or Vivelle Dot patch (estradiol)
- Premarin Cream (conjugated equine estrogen)
- Ogen Cream (estropipate)
- FemRing (estradiol, vaginal ring)
- Estring (estradiol, vaginal ring)

All these medicines are as effective as the other hormone drugs but less expensive. They could save you \$300 to \$450 a year over other hormone products.

This information was last updated in November 2005.

Go to CRBestBuyDrugs.org for the latest information on female hormones and the other drug classes we examine.

Hormone drugs cost comparison¹

	Generic name	Brand name ²	Dose ranges	Frequency of use ³	Average monthly cost ⁴
	Estrogen-only pills				
	Estradiol	Estrace	0.5 to 2.0mg	1 daily	\$32 to \$45
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol	Generic	0.5 to 2.0mg	1 daily	\$6 to \$14
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol	Gynodiol	0.5 to 2.0mg	1 daily	\$8 to \$16
	Conjugated equine estrogen	Premarin	0.3 to 2.5mg	1 daily	\$34 to \$52
	Synthetic conjugated estrogen	Cenestin	0.3 to 1.25mg	1 daily	\$33 to \$39
CR BEST BUY	Esterified estrogens	Estratab, Menest	0.3 to 2.5mg	1 daily	\$14 to \$61
	Estropipate	Ogen, Ortho-Est	0.625 to 2.5mg	1 daily	\$27 to \$69
	Estropipate	Generic	0.625 to 3.0mg	1 daily	\$9 to \$23
	Estrogen-only skin patches				
	Estradiol	Climara	0.025 to 0.1mg per 24 hours	1 weekly	\$48 to \$54
	Estradiol	Estroderm	0.05 to 0.1mg per 24 hours	2 weekly	\$52 to \$56
	Estradiol	Menostar	0.014mg per 24 hours	1 weekly	\$62
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol - Vivelle dot	Vivelle, Vivelle Dot	0.025 to 0.1mg per 24 hours	2 weekly	\$32 to \$59
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol	Alora	0.025 to 0.1mg per 24 hours	2 weekly	\$31 to \$53
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol	Generic	0.05 to 1.0mg per 24 hours	1 weekly	\$29 to \$37
	Estrogen-only skin creams				
	Estradiol	Estrogel	1.25 grams	Once daily	\$40 to \$49
	Estradiol	Estrasorb	3.5 grams	Once daily	\$47 to \$62
	Estrogen plus progesterone pills				
	Conjugated equine estrogen/medroxyprogesterone	Prempro, Premphase	0.3 to 5.0mg	1 daily	\$50 to \$52
	Estradiol plus norgestimate	Ortho-Prefest, Prefest	1mg/0.09mg	1 daily	\$41 to \$46
	Estrogen plus progesterone skin patches				
	Estradiol plus levonorgestrel	Climara Pro	0.045mg/0.015mg per 24 hours	1 weekly	\$53
	Estradiol plus norethindrone	CombiPatch	0.05mg/0.14mg per 24 hours	2 weekly	\$51 to \$53
	Estrogen-only vaginal creams, tablets or rings				
CR BEST BUY	Conjugated equine estrogen	Premarin Cream	0.625mg/gram	0.5 to 1 gram a day	\$20 to \$39 ⁵
CR BEST BUY	Estriopipate	Ogen Cream	1.5mg/gram	1 to 2 grams a day	\$27 to \$54 ⁵
	Estradiol	Estrace Cream	1.5mg/gram	1 to 2 grams a day	\$41 to \$81 ⁵
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol	FemRing	0.05 to 0.1mg per 24 hours	1 every 3 months	\$42 to \$48
CR BEST BUY	Estradiol	Estring	0.0075mg per 24 hours	One every 3 months	\$42
	Progesterone pills⁶				
	Medroxyprogesterone	Cycrin, Provera	2.5mg	1 daily	\$27
CR BEST BUY	Medroxyprogesterone	Generic	2.5mg to 10mg	1 daily	\$10 to \$21
	Norethindrone	Aygestin	5mg	1 daily	\$77
	Progesterone	Prometrium	100mg, 200mg	1 daily	\$48 to \$89

(1) For space reasons, this is a sampling of female hormone drug products. For the complete list, see the full 21-page report at CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

(2) "Generic" means that this row quotes the average price of available generics.

(3) As typically prescribed. May vary and that will affect the cost. Prices for creams are calculated for common dose ranges.

(4) Reflects nationwide average retail price in July 2005, rounded to nearest dollar. Monthly cost ranges reflect varying price of different doses.

Lower doses are less expensive, higher doses more expensive. Principle data source: Wolters Kluwer Health, a health-care information company. Additional pricing data from other sources.

(5) Price range for these creams depends on how much is applied. Use is generally for 21 days of each month, and price is calculated on that basis.

(6) Can be prescribed for full month or part of each month. Partial month price.