

Health Facts: *Estrogen*

Overview

Estrogen refers to a group of hormones that play an essential role in the growth and development of female sexual characteristics and the reproductive process.

Symptoms

Hormone disorders can cause a wide variety of symptoms that also are associated with other conditions. Accurate diagnosis of hormonal disorders is important to determining appropriate treatment, which often includes estrogen therapy. The following are common reasons estrogen therapy is prescribed:

- Delayed puberty
- Irregular menstrual periods
- Contraception
- Menopausal symptoms
 - Irregular menstrual periods
 - Hot flashes (sudden warm feeling, sometimes with blushing or sweating)
 - Night sweats (hot flashes that occur at night, often disrupting sleep)
 - Fatigue (probably from disrupted sleep patterns)
 - Mood swings
 - Early morning awakening
 - Vaginal dryness
 - Fluctuations in sexual desire or response
 - Difficulty sleeping

Facts to Know

The term "estrogen" includes a group of closely related compounds, including estradiol, estrone and estriol.

Estrogen is produced in the ovaries, adrenal glands and fat tissues. It prepares the reproductive organs for conception and pregnancy. Estriol, a form of estrogen, is produced by the placenta during pregnancy.

By the time you reach menopause, you will produce only about one-third the amount of estrogen you produced during your childbearing years.

Supplemental estrogen taken after menopause does not appear to prevent heart disease when initiated in older women several years past menopause.

There is new evidence that long-term use of hormone therapy may increase a women's risk of ovarian cancer and that estrogen plus progestin may possibly increase lung cancer mortality.

Findings from a memory sub-study of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) indicate that women who are older than 65 when they start taking combination hormone therapy have an increased risk of developing dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, compared with women who do not take the medication.

**Want to learn more about estrogen?
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