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BIOIDENTICAL HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY

Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy, otherwise known as BHRT, has become a very popular way of delivering hormone therapy to women in the perimenopause and menopause. It is an alternative to traditional hormone replacement therapy. Traditional hormone therapy includes such name brands as Activella, Femhrt, Prempro, Combipatch, Vivelle, and Divigel, to name just a few. BHRT is customized specifically to suit the individual woman's needs, and often includes using not only estrogen and progesterone, which is found in traditional HRT, but also testosterone, thyroid, and DHEA. It is prepared, or "compounded", by a pharmacist who has unique training and a specialized laboratory in his pharmacy. Patients who are interested in BHRT are first seen by a physician for a consultation and then referred to the pharmacist for the actual preparation of that prescription.

The purpose of BHRT is to replace and "balance" the female hormones in such a way as to replicate the hormonal environment of a woman in her reproductive years. Some women do not experience improvement in symptoms from traditional hormone therapy, and so BHRT may be more effective for them. The difference between traditional hormone therapy and BHRT is that traditional HRT can be filled at any pharmacy and is usually used on a "trial-and-error" basis. Usually, it is much less costly for the patient and does not require repeated visits to the doctor. Patients who are on BHRT are evaluated and tested regularly with blood work, which measures their serum estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, thyroid, and DHEA levels. Adjustments in the medication are made every 3 months depending on how the patient feels and what the blood analysis indicates. The hormone levels are maintained within a certain range thought to be physiologic to the woman.

Both traditional and bioidentical HRT provide many health benefits to women, which in our opinion, outweigh the risks for most patients. Every patient must be counseled and screened for her personal risk factors and family history to determine if HRT is right for her. Some healthcare providers feel that BHRT is a "safer" alternative to conventional hormone therapy. Most of the scientific data regarding hormone therapy is derived from traditional hormone replacement therapy. Those studies suggest that, in general, hormones appear to be safe for most women as long as they are monitored carefully and counseled about their individual risks and benefits on an annual basis. Our philosophy is to keep the patient on the lowest dose possible to alleviate her symptoms.

Our recommendation is that patients need to be seen initially for a thorough history and physical examination, taking into consideration her individual health risks, family history and special concerns. BHRT is prescribed based upon those specific issues. Examples of these issues include hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, vaginal dryness or painful intercourse, mood swings, and weight gain. Occasionally, patients may receive a combination of both BHRT and traditional hormone therapy, depending upon her physical and emotional needs. Our goal is to provide the best possible care for our patients and accomplish effective symptom relief while keeping her well monitored in a safe environment.