

PATIENT HANDOUT PROGESTERONE

What is progesterone?

- Progesterone (proe-JES-ter-one) is one of several sex hormones made by the human body. Other sex hormones produced by the body include estrogen, estradiol, estriol, and testosterone.
- In women, progesterone is produced by the ovaries. Progesterone helps to regulate the menstrual cycle and is necessary to sustain a pregnancy.
 - An increase in progesterone level leads to a build-up in the lining of the endometrium, the inner part of the uterus, preparing the uterus for implantation of a fertilized egg. The progesterone level decreases when fertilization does not occur, leading to shedding of the uterine lining as menstruation.
 - An increase in progesterone level also is responsible for signaling the mammary glands to produce milk.
- Progesterone is produced naturally in the body. There are several synthetic forms of progesterone, called progestins, which are manufactured and are not found naturally in the human body. Progestins are the type of progesterone found in most commercially available hormone replacement products and birth control pills.

Why do we need to supplement the body's natural production of progesterone?

- As women enter menopause, their levels of progesterone and other sex hormones decrease. This often leads to unwanted symptoms such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness, breast tenderness, low libido, depression, anxiety, food cravings, insomnia, cramps, emotional swings, weight gain, and bloating. Because of these effects, some women choose to supplement their levels of sex hormones by taking hormone replacement therapy.
- The decision to begin hormone replacement therapy should be made after careful discussion with your doctor and pharmacist. There are both benefits and risks to taking hormone replacement therapy that should be weighed before you begin a hormone replacement regimen. Each woman is different, and the right decision for one woman may not be the right decision for another.

What is progesterone's role in hormone replacement therapy?

- Aids in the function of thyroid hormone
- Helps maintain sex drive
- Improves mood
- May help relieve hot flashes
- Protects against and helps reverse osteoporosis
- Protects against breast cancer and endometrial cancer

Who should avoid taking progesterone?

- If you have any of these conditions, you should not take progesterone without discussing it with your doctor and pharmacist:
 - Allergy to progesterone
 - Arterial disease (or high risk for arterial disease)
 - Liver disease
 - Major depression
 - Pregnancy (although some women with low natural levels of progesterone may be given progesterone during pregnancy)
 - Vaginal bleeding of unknown cause
- Women who have any of the following diseases may experience fluid retention from progesterone:
 - Asthma
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Epilepsy
 - Kidney dysfunction
 - Migraines

What are the available dosage forms of progesterone?

- Injection
- Oral capsules, tablets, or liquid
- Topical cream or gel
 - If you are using topical progesterone, avoid skin-to-skin contact with others for at least 30 minutes.
- Troches (lozenges that melt under the tongue)
- Vaginal suppository

How is progesterone different from the progestins?

- Unlike progesterone, which is made by the body, progestins are commercially prepared chemicals that are not identical to those made naturally by the body.
- Because of this, side effects of progesterone and progestins differ in type and severity.
 - Progestins
 - Synthetic progestins increase the level of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad," cholesterol, and decrease the level of high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or "good," cholesterol—and thus can increase a woman's risk of developing atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries).
 - Other side effects of synthetic progestins include abdominal bloating, breast discomfort, headache, depression, weight gain, and acne.

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