

Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care System Area Prescribing Committee (APC)

CONTINUOUS COMBINED HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT) – ORAL PROGESTERONE PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

NOTE: THIS LEAFLET HAS BEEN CREATED FOR WOMEN PRESCRIBED CONTINUOUS COMBINED HRT FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS, WHERE THEY HAVE NOT HAD A PERIOD FOR OVER ONE YEAR AND WHERE PROGESTERONE IS PRESCRIBED IN THE FORM OF AN ORAL CAPSULE. SOME WOMEN TAKE PROGESTERONE INTERMITTENTLY, THIS CAN BE SWITCHED TO CONTINUOUSLY AFTER 1 YEAR. PLEASE SPEAK TO YOUR CLINICIAN FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

There are 2 types of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). The type you take depends on where you are in the menopause, and if your periods have stopped completely for a year.

OESTROGEN ONLY HRT (NO PROGESTOGEN)

- Oestrogen-only HRT is used if you have had a surgery to remove your womb (a hysterectomy) or if you have an intrauterine system (IUS) such as Mirena.
- Oestrogen-only HRT does not contain progestogen.

If you have an IUS in place, this will provide you with a source of progesterone. Progesterone is required to protect your womb. You will require both progesterone and oestrogen but as you are getting progesterone from the IUS, you will only require oestrogen only HRT. This will need to be changed every 5 years, but if the IUS is removed and you decide to continue on HRT, you will then need progesterone added to your prescription.

COMBINED HRT (OESTROGEN & PROGESTOGEN)

Combined HRT is used if you still have a womb and can be used in 2 ways:

1) CONTINUOUS COMBINED HRT

[CONTINUOUS COMBINED HRT: A MEDICINE FOR MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS - NHS \(WWW.NHS.UK\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

- If your periods have stopped for over a year (postmenopausal), you take oestrogen and progesterone (a type of progestogen hormone) together once a day continuously, starting the next pack once you finish the first. This means that you do not have any withdrawal bleeds.

2) SEQUENTIAL COMBINED HRT

[SEQUENTIAL COMBINED HRT: A MEDICINE TO TREAT MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS - NHS \(WWW.NHS.UK\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

- If your periods have not stopped for more than a year (perimenopausal), you will take oestrogen only for the first 14 days. Then you take oestrogen and progesterone together for the next 12 days, (beginning on Day 15 of the cycle and ending on Day 26). This cycle is repeated every 28 days. The first day of a woman's period is Day 1 of the menstrual cycle. This usually results in monthly withdrawal bleeds. After 1 year of sequential HRT, you can swap to continuous combined HRT. Please speak to your clinician to discuss this change. Women under the age of 50 who had shorter durations of amenorrhoea (absence of menstrual periods) before starting HRT are likely to need to continue on sequential HRT for a longer duration before switching to continuous combined HRT.
Further information on sequential combined HRT can be found in the patient information leaflet inside the medicine pack.

ORAL PROGESTERONE AS AN INDIVIDUAL INGREDIENT FOR CONTINUOUS COMBINED HRT

If you have a womb, taking progesterone is vital to protect your womb lining from the effects of oestrogen in your HRT. Oestrogen alone can cause excessive thickening of the lining of the womb (endometrial hyperplasia) which can then lead to cancer of the womb lining (endometrial cancer). Progesterone stops the womb lining from getting too thick, protecting you from this risk.

Progesterone can come in combination with oestrogen in various formulations including patches and oral tablets.

Progesterone also comes as an individual ingredient. This can be in the form of an intrauterine system (IUS) or oral capsules.

Continuous use of oral progesterone

Taking oral progesterone continuously is *'off licence'* which means that the instructions are different from those recommended by the manufacturer. There is strong evidence that taking progesterone continuously is safe. This use is recommended by medical authorities in the UK.

What are the benefits of Continuous Combined HRT?

By taking the progesterone continuously, you stop having a regular monthly bleed, which has no known medical benefits. It is convenient if you want to avoid bleeding, e.g. on special occasions, and avoids having to work out which days of your cycle to take the pill.

Clinical evidence has shown that continuous combined HRT provides more effective endometrial protection than sequential HRT.

What are the side effects of oral progesterone?

- **Spotting or bleeding**
- **Breast pain or tenderness.** This usually improves after a few weeks as your body gets used to the medicine. Speak to a doctor if it bothers you or does not go away. If you notice a lump or changes in your breasts, contact your doctor for advice.
- **Headaches** – usually only last a few days after you start treatment. If headaches last longer than a week or are severe, speak to your doctor.
- **Mood changes including low mood or depression.** Talk to your doctor if you have problems with mood changes and they do not improve.
- **Fluid retention**
- **Feeling tired or dizzy**

What happens if I get bleeding taking my HRT continuously?

Irregular bleeding or 'spotting' is common and can occur intermittently or continually and in the first 3-6 months after starting HRT but usually settles down over time. If you get any bleeding after 6 months of taking HRT, speak to your clinician.

What happens if I forget to take my HRT?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember it. However, if it is nearly time for the next dose, skip the missed dose.

Do not take double the dose to make up for the missed dose.

How long can I take my HRT continuously for?

There is no fixed limit on how long you can take HRT. It's best to only take HRT for as long as the benefits outweigh the risks. This depends on your symptoms, your age and any risk factors you have. You'll usually have a review every year but if you are unsure speak to your clinician.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE REFER TO THE PRODUCT LEAFLET IN THE PACKAGING

PLEASE NOTE: HRT IS NOT A FORM OF CONTRACEPTIVE.

REFERENCE:

[14-BMS-TfC-Progestogens-and-endometrial-protection-01H.pdf \(thebms.org.uk\)](#)

[Utrogestan 100mg Capsules - Patient Information Leaflet \(PIL\) - \(emc\) \(medicines.org.uk\)](#)

[27-WHC-FACTSHEET-HRT-Doses-NOV2022-A.pdf \(womens-health-concern.org\)](#)

[Utrogestan: an HRT medicine to treat menopause symptoms - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Hormone replacement therapy \(HRT\) - Overview | Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust \(guysandstthomas.nhs.uk\)](#)

[03-BMS-TfC-HRT-Practical-Prescribing-NOV2022-A.pdf \(thebms.org.uk\)](#)