



Our Recommendations

Pills, creams, skin patches, and other products containing the female hormones estrogen and/or progesterin are prescribed to treat the symptoms of menopause. But, as is now well known, these medicines increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. As a result, doctors today prescribe these medicines far more cautiously.

To help you and your doctor, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated these medicines based on their effectiveness, safety, ease of use, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a 20-page report you can access on the Internet at www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs. 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 Drug Effectiveness Review Project based at Oregon Health and Science University. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* is partially funded by a grant from the Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program.

DO YOU NEED A HORMONE DRUG?

You and your doctor may want to consider hormone treatment if your symptoms are moderate to severe and significantly disrupt your life. About 70 percent of women will have some menopause symptoms when they stop menstruating. But only about 20 percent who have any symptoms at all will have severe symptoms. Whether your doctor prescribes a hormone for you will also depend on your medical history and particularly your risk factors for heart disease and cancer.

Is Menopause to Blame?

Symptoms of Menopause	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, feel chilled or feel faint. • Night Sweats – Hot flashes that occur at night. • Sleep disturbances – Awaken more easily, sleep more lightly or can not 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, these symptoms may be triggered by getting too little sleep. • 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 the female hormones estrogen and/or progesterin reduce the frequency of hot flashes and night sweats by about 75 percent for most women who take them. They also reduce vaginal dryness.

But women and their doctors must carefully weigh the risks against the benefits of such drugs since all female hormone products increase the risk of serious adverse effects – heart disease, breast cancer, blood clots, and strokes. Recent research has helped clarify which women are most at risk for such problems. From that research we make the following general recommendations:

- Don't take hormones if your symptoms are mild and can be managed by changing your lifestyle and habits, such as quitting smoking or sleeping in a cooler room.
- Don't take hormones if you have heart disease, or have had a stroke or cancer of the breast, ovaries or uterus. Also, don't take them if you have diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure.
- If hormone treatment is not precluded by the above factors, and your symptoms are moderate to severe, and if you are in the *first five years of menopause*, you may be a candidate for hormone treatment. The evidence is strong that women aged 50 to 59 who have entered menopause within the past five years incur *no added risk of heart disease when they take hormones*.













Taking a wide variety of factors, including cost, into account, we chose the following as *Best Buys*:

- *Generic estradiol pills*
- *Gynodiol pills (estradiol)*
- *Menest pills (esterified estrogen)*
- *Generic estropipate pills*
- *Generic medroxyprogesterone pills*
- *Generic estradiol patch*
- *Estraderm (estradiol skin patch)*
- *Prempro (estrogen-progesterin combination pill)*
- *Prefest (estrogen-progesterin combination pill)*
- *Climara Pro (estrogen-progesterin patch)*
- *Combipatch (estrogen-progesterin patch)*
- *Premarin vaginal cream (conjugated equine estrogen)*
- *FemRing (estradiol vaginal ring)*
- *Estring (estradiol vaginal ring)*

All these medicines are as effective as other hormone drugs, and several are quite a bit less expensive. Most generic estradiol pills, for example, cost less than \$15 a month, and could save you up to \$400 a year compared to brand-name Premarin pills.

This information was last updated in October 2008.

Hormone Cost Comparison¹

	Generic Name	Brand Name ²	Dose Ranges	Frequency of Use ³	Average Monthly Cost ⁴
Estrogen-only pills					
	Estradiol	Estrace	0.5-2.0mg	1 daily	\$49-\$63
	Estradiol	Generic	0.5-2.0mg	1 daily	\$7-\$13
	Conjugated equine estrogen	Premarin	0.3-1.25mg	1 daily	\$47-\$48
	Esterified estrogens	Menest	0.3-2.5mg	1 daily	\$18-\$68
	Estropipate	Ogen	0.625-2.5mg	1 daily	\$35-\$85
	Estropipate	Generic	0.625-3.0mg	1 daily	\$11-\$25
Estrogen-only skin patches					
	Estradiol	Climara	0.025-0.1 mg per 24 hours	1 weekly	\$52-\$53
	Estradiol	Estraderm	0.05-0.1 mg per 24 hours	1 weekly	\$23-\$59
	Estradiol	Vivelle, Vivelle Dot	0.025-0.1 mg per 24 hours	2 weekly	\$48-\$54
	Estradiol	Generic	0.05-1.0mg per 24 hours	2 weekly	\$37-\$38
Estrogen-only skin creams and sprays					
	Estradiol	Estrogel	1.25 grams	Once daily	\$70-\$105
	Estradiol	Estrasorb	2.5 grams	Twice daily	\$61
	Estradiol	Divigel	0.25-1.0mg	Once daily	\$73
	Estradiol	Evamist	1.53-4.59 mg	1-3 sprays daily	\$52
Estrogen plus progesterone pills					
	Conjugated equine estrogen/medroxyprogesterone	Prempro, Premphase	0.3mg/1.5mg-0.625mg/5.0mg	1 daily	\$60
	Estradiol plus norgestimate	Prefest	1mg/0.09mg	1 daily	\$58
	Estradiol plus norethindrone	Activella	1mg/0.5mg	1 daily	\$61-\$65
	Estradiol plus drospirenone	Angeliq	1mg/0.5mg	1 daily	\$73
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/0.14mgper 24 hours	2 weekly	\$53
Estrogen-only vaginal creams, tablets or rings					
	Conjugated equine estrogen	Premarin Cream	0.625mg/gram	0.5 to 2 grams a day	\$25-100 ⁵
	Estradiol	Estrace Cream	1.5mg/gram	1 to 2 grams a day	\$50-150 ⁵
	Estradiol tablet	VagiFem	0.025mg	1 per day for two weeks then 10 a month	\$42-\$93
	Estradiol	FemRing	0.05-0.1 mg per 24 hours	One every 3 months	\$51-\$55
	Estradiol	Estring	0.0075mg per 24 hours	One every 3 months	\$53

1. Because of space restrictions, this is a sampling of hormone products. For the complete list, see the full report at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.

2. Generic means that this row has the average price of available generics.

3. As typically prescribed. May vary and that will affect the cost.

4. Prices reflect nationwide average retail price for June, 2008, rounded to nearest dollar. Monthly cost ranges reflects varying price of different doses. Lower doses are less expensive, higher doses more expensive. Prices were derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health Pharmaceutical Audit Suite. The company Destination Rx assisted in calculating dose ranges and average prices. Wolters Kluwer Health is not involved in our analysis and recommendations.

5. The cost of these vaginal creams is highly dependent on use and prices we obtained online and elsewhere for the exact same size tubes for both products varied three to fourfold. Also, women use varying amounts to get relief, though typically the products are not intended for use more than 21 days per month. As a result, we have given a general price range for both.

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