Don’t Quit HRT Yet: Here’s What Happens Next? An OB-GYN Breaks It Down! Transcript

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Why Most Women Quit HRT Too Early

Most women who Most women who stop stop stop hormone therapy hormone therapy do so within the first do so within the first month and almost month and almost always for the same always for the same reason.

reason. reason. No one explained to them what No one explained to them what it really it really looks like and what looks like and what time limits exist.

time limits exist. They expect to They expect to feel great the very feel great the very next day. next day. They face a They face a little little little difficulty at difficulty at the beginning and give up the beginning and give up just before the just before the real effect begins. So real effect begins. So in this video, I'm going in this video, I'm going to tell you what's to tell you what's actually actually actually happening to your happening to your body month by body month by month by month during the month during the first six months of first six months of hormone replacement hormone replacement hormone replacement therapy. So that you therapy. So that you know exactly what to expect and don't give up too and don't give up too soon. I'm soon. I'm Dr. Jen, a dual- dual- boarded OB-GYN and boarded OB-GYN and integrative integrative integrative medicine physician, and I've medicine physician, and I've helped thousands of helped thousands of women navigate this very women navigate this very path and stay on path and stay on schedule. This is what schedule. This is what no one no one talks about. HRT is talks about. HRT is not an instant not an instant switch, it is a switch, it is a gradual process.

gradual process.

The First 2 Weeks: What to Expect

This really takes This really takes time. Your symptoms will not time. Your symptoms will not all go away at once. all go away at once. They improve in a They improve in a very predictable very predictable order, and knowing order, and knowing that order is the best thing you best thing you can do to avoid can do to avoid giving up too giving up too early. Let's start with the early. Let's start with the first two weeks, first two weeks, because that's when because that's when most women most women start to panic. When estrogen. When estrogen starts circulating, starts circulating, your body your body readjusts, readjusts, readjusts, and this and this adaptation process can be adaptation process can be a bit tricky. Some a bit tricky. Some women experience women experience relief almost relief almost immediately, especially with immediately, especially with sleep, but others sleep, but others notice mild notice mild side effects like side effects like breast tenderness, breast tenderness, bloating, occasional bloating, occasional spotting, and nausea.

spotting, and nausea. About the same way About the same way they felt while they felt while taking taking taking birth control birth control birth control pills. Here's what I pills. Here's what I want you to know. These want you to know. These side effects are side effects are usually temporary at the beginning usually temporary at the beginning and are not a and are not a sign that sign that hormone replacement hormone replacement hormone replacement therapy is not therapy is not right for you. They right for you. They indicate that indicate that your body is your body is adapting. The adapting.

Early Side Effects & Why They Happen

The main mistake is to stop treatment in the to stop treatment in the second week because of second week because of symptoms that would disappear symptoms that would disappear in the next few in the next few weeks, especially by the weeks, especially by the fourth. But if fourth. But if you feel something you feel something serious or worrisome, serious or worrisome, of course, see a of course, see a doctor. However, doctor. However, difficult first weeks difficult first weeks may be the norm.

may be the norm. This does not mean that This does not mean that hormone replacement hormone replacement hormone replacement therapy does not work. therapy does not work.

Mild side effects are Mild side effects are usually temporary, usually temporary, so don't give up. so don't give up. You will miss You will miss the most interesting thing— positive results. Somewhere between the second and. Somewhere between the second and eighth weeks, early eighth weeks, early symptoms usually symptoms usually subside and subside and true true true relief begins.

relief begins. Most women Most women initially experience initially experience initially experience improved sleep improved sleep as their as their hot flashes disappear. This hot flashes disappear. This chain then affects chain then affects other things: your other things: your mood, patience, and mood, patience, and energy. Hot flashes energy. Hot flashes usually go away usually go away pretty quickly, but pretty quickly, but things like " things like " head fog" or libido head fog" or libido take 6 to 8 take 6 to 8 weeks, and sometimes up to 3 weeks, and sometimes up to 3 months. If your months.

Weeks 2u20138: When Relief Starts

If your main symptoms main symptoms have improved significantly, have improved significantly, you are on the right you are on the right track. But if they have track. But if they have hardly changed, hardly changed, this is not a reason to quit this is not a reason to quit therapy. You may therapy. You may want to discuss want to discuss adjusting your adjusting your dose or method of dose or method of hormone administration with your doctor, hormone administration with your doctor, as sometimes an as sometimes an insufficient dose insufficient dose can feel like can feel like you're not you're not taking anything. In the second taking anything. In the second and third months, and third months, slower symptoms slower symptoms begin begin begin to change. The fog in to change. The fog in the head dissipates, the head dissipates, the mood becomes normal, the mood becomes normal, and for some, their libido even and for some, their libido even begins to return begins to return. Especially. Especially if you added if you added testosterone. One final testosterone. One final note: systemic note: systemic estrogen, which acts estrogen, which acts throughout the body, does not throughout the body, does not resolve vaginal resolve vaginal or urinary symptoms or urinary symptoms on its own, as these on its own, as these tissues often tissues often require require require additional additional additional topical treatment.

topical treatment.

Months 2u20133: Brain Fog, Mood & Libido

So if these symptoms are So if these symptoms are still bothering you still bothering you at this point, that's at this point, that's to be expected, but to be expected, but you can add low-dose vaginal estrogen. Over low-dose vaginal estrogen. Over time, you time, you will need less and less will need less and less vaginal vaginal vaginal estrogen as your estrogen as your systemic estrogen levels systemic estrogen levels stabilize. That's stabilize. That's why the 6- why the 6- month mark is so important, month mark is so important, and it's not just about and it's not just about how you how you feel.

feel. feel. Powerful processes are taking place in your body Powerful processes are taking place in your body that you don't that you don't necessarily necessarily necessarily feel physically. And feel physically. And at the 6-month stage, at the 6-month stage, almost no one is almost no one is told to make an told to make an appointment. I'll talk appointment. I'll talk about both of these aspects about both of these aspects right now.

right now. Stay with me, Stay with me, because this is what protects because this is what protects your health in the your health in the long long long run. By 3-6 run. By 3-6 months, most months, most women describe the same women describe the same thing, but in different thing, but in different words. I words. I feel like myself again.

feel like myself again. Acute symptoms have Acute symptoms have been mostly been mostly brought under control. brought under control.

Months 3u20136: Feeling Like Yourself Again

Your sleep and mood Your sleep and mood have improved, and your have improved, and your body has adapted body has adapted to the new to the new hormone replacement hormone replacement hormone replacement therapy. This is where therapy. This is where your daily habits your daily habits start to produce start to produce real results.

real results. If you have been If you have been strength strength strength training and training and paying attention to paying attention to protein during HRT, protein during HRT, you will you will notice real notice real changes in body composition, changes in body composition, weight loss, and weight loss, and strength gains right now. HRT strength gains right now. HRT creates a base, but what creates a base, but what you do on that you do on that base determines base determines the results in the the results in the months to come. But here's what months to come. But here's what you can't you can't feel.

feel. feel. Meanwhile, estrogen quietly Meanwhile, estrogen quietly slows slows slows bone loss, which bone loss, which accelerates during accelerates during menopause and menopause and premenopause. This premenopause. This helps helps helps protect against protect against fractures that could fractures that could occur years later.

occur years later. If you start taking it at If you start taking it at the beginning of premenopause, it also has a positive, it also has a positive effect on effect on heart health and metabolism.

heart health and metabolism. You won't feel these You won't feel these changes every day, but they changes every day, but they may be more may be more important to important to your future your future than relieving than relieving the symptoms you're the symptoms you're experiencing today.

experiencing today.

The Hidden Benefits: Bone, Heart & Metabolic Health

That's why 6 months is a checkpoint, is a checkpoint, not a finish line. This is the not a finish line. This is the time to meet with time to meet with your doctor, discuss your doctor, discuss what's working, and what's working, and adjust what's adjust what's left: change your left: change your dose, add dose, add vaginal estrogen, vaginal estrogen, or evaluate the or evaluate the feasibility of taking feasibility of taking testosterone. It's been testosterone. It's been 6 months and although you 6 months and although you feel much feel much better, you're still not better, you're still not fully fully fully adjusted. So, adjusted. So, let's look at the let's look at the order of changes when you order of changes when you start start start hormone replacement therapy.

hormone replacement therapy. First, you will notice First, you will notice that your sleep and hot flashes that your sleep and hot flashes disappear within disappear within a few weeks.

a few weeks. Next comes Next comes Next comes improved mood improved mood and energy levels. " Head fog" and Head fog" and libido take libido take a little longer, up to a little longer, up to 6 months. Vaginal 6 months. Vaginal and urinary symptoms and urinary symptoms may be may be slow to resolve, especially slow to resolve, especially if you don't if you don't use use use topical remedies. But topical remedies.

What to Review at the 6-Month Mark

But bone protection bone protection occurs occurs occurs throughout throughout throughout this time. Now that this time. Now that you know this procedure, you know this procedure, you can stop you can stop panicking. Not everything panicking. Not everything gets fixed gets fixed gets fixed instantly. Everyone is instantly. Everyone is different, different, different, so use so use this as a roadmap this as a roadmap and discuss your and discuss your progress with your doctor.

progress with your doctor. So, if you So, if you remember just remember just one thing: HRT is a process, one

thing: HRT is a process, not a switch. The first not a switch. The first 2 weeks can be 2 weeks can be challenging, real challenging, real relief usually relief usually comes by the eighth comes by the eighth week, and the 6-month week, and the 6-month mark is a time for mark is a time for reassessment and reassessment and optimization, not optimization, not expecting expecting expecting perfection. Don't perfection. Don't evaluate hormone evaluate hormone therapy week by therapy week by week, because that week, because that takes time.

takes time.

HRT Is a Curve, Not a Switch I am talking about this one

Evaluate it by the Evaluate it by the overall trend, the time it took, the time it took to act, and whether there is to act, and whether there is improvement during improvement during that period. If that period. If you have been on treatment for several you have been on treatment for several months and are not months and are not getting getting getting the expected the expected the expected relief, often the relief, often the problem is not the problem is not the hormone itself. Perhaps it's a matter of hormone itself. Perhaps it's a matter of dosage dosage dosage or duration.

or duration. For example, a patch or For example, a patch or gel, etc. I already gel, etc. I already covered this in a covered this in a previous video: previous video: estrogen patch estrogen patch vs. gel. So, I'll vs. gel. So, I'll put it right put it right here. Check it out, and see you in the, and see you in the