



香港婦產科學院
**THE HONG KONG COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNAECOLOGISTS**
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More news on ERT

Effects of Estrogen in Postmenopausal Women with Hysterectomy

Dr Robert C L Law,
Spokesman, HKCOG

The estrogen-alone arm of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) involving about 11,000 women was officially terminated on 2nd March 2004 after nearly 7 years by the National Institute of Health. The main reason was that sufficient information on outcome had been gathered and there was no apparent reason to continue the study to its planned completion in 2005.

A total of 10739 postmenopausal women (all with prior hysterectomy), aged 50-79, enrolled in this randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled disease prevention trial. The main findings are:

1. Stroke----- women on estrogen therapy has an excess risk of 12 cases per 10,000 women/year (44 cases versus 32 cases for women on placebo).
2. Venous Thrombosis ----- an excess of 6 cases per 10,000 women/year (21 cases versus 15 cases for women on placebo).
3. Hip Fracture ----- A reduction of 6 cases per 10,000 women/year (11 cases versus 17 cases for women on placebo).
4. Colorectal cancer ----- No statistical difference in risk (17 cases versus 16 cases for women on placebo).
5. Heart Attack----- No statistical difference in risk (49 cases versus 54 cases for women on placebo).
6. Breast cancer -----No statistical difference in risk (26 cases versus 33 cases for women on placebo).

The totality of monitored effects suggested an overall balance of risks and benefits and, importantly, no effect on total mortality. Based on these findings, women taking estrogen therapy should be counseled about an increased risk of stroke but can be reassured about no excess risk of heart attack or breast cancer for at least 6.8 years (duration of the study).

Finally it must be noted that this study was about one particular form of oral estrogen (Conjugated Equine Estrogen) only, and the results may or may not be applicable to other formulations or medications with other routes of administration. The subjects were women with prior hysterectomy and were relatively old (50-79 years with a median age of 63 years). This study also did not address the issues of other benefits of postmenopausal hormone therapy such as general well-being, sexual problems, and postmenopausal symptoms.

Ref: Effects of Conjugated Equine Estrogen in Postmenopausal Women with Hysterectomy, The Women's Health Initiative Randomized Controlled Trial, The Women's Health Initiative Steering Committee, *JAMA*, April 14, 2004; 291: 1701-1712.

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