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Is this the end of hormone replacement?

For the last 60 years, medical science has felt that hormone replacement therapy is necessary for a woman to keep her body in the hormonal range of premenopausal women for decades to come.

Various estrogens were used in the 40's. There have been problems before in the use of other hormones, such as Diethyl Stilbesterol (DES). The drug

Premarine®, was launched and many women began using it. Within several years, it was found that there was a higher incidence of cancer of the uterus in those women that still had theirs. It is now an estab-



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lished fact that unopposed estrogen can cause uterine cancer. As time went on, progesterone began to be used to combat this problem. Upjohn promoted Provera® (medrol-progesterone) to be taken, along with the estrogen for this purpose. The medical profession is in agreement that a woman who still has a uterus should not use unopposed estrogen and therefore is given the combination of Premarin and Provera. When the patent ran out on Provera three years ago, American Home Products added their medrol-progesterone to the already formulated Premarin, and this new mixture was called Prempro®.

Starting in the 1990s, the Women's Health Initiative launched several studies, to see what would be the best preventative strategies in postmenopausal women. They studied 16,608 women, age 50-79, all of whom had a uterus. These were reviewed by 40

centers, between 1993 and 1998. After an average of 5.2 years follow-up, the Data and Safety Monitoring Board recommended stopping the trial because negative test statistics from cancer exceeded the stopping boundary for adverse effects. This was reported in the July 17, 2002 issue of "JAMA". This article, when released to the media, immediately became sensational. Noted in the first year, there was a higher average incidence of stroke, heart attack and blood clots. The data indicated that, if 10,000 women take their hormone combination for one year, as compared to the same number who do not, eight more will develop invasive breast cancer, seven more will have a heart attack, and eight more will have a stroke. On the positive side, 1/3 less of the women will suffer hip fractures and there will be a significantly less occurrence of cancer of the colon.

What is a woman to think?