

Abstract

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A comprehensive review of the safety and efficacy of bioidentical hormones for the management of menopause and related health risks.

Moskowitz D.

BACKGROUND: Numerous forms of estrogens and progestins are utilized for the treatment of menopausal complaints and associated conditions that occur temporally. Although known to be different with respect to molecular structure, receptor affinity, metabolism, and other physiological traits, most have been treated as if they were clinically identical.

OBJECTIVE: The majority of these hormone preparations, commonly referred to as hormone replacement therapy (HRT), should perhaps be more aptly referred to as hormone substitution therapy, as most of the therapies utilized do not exactly match those produced in the body. Research indicates these synthetic hormones vary clinically in safety and efficacy. As such, women and their physicians have, in increasing numbers, been opting for the use of bioidentical hormones; i.e., those that match the structure and function of hormones produced in the body. With greater utilization and research surrounding bioidentical hormones, the differences can now begin to be fully assessed and appreciated.

FINDINGS: This article reviews the disparities between synthetic and bioidentical estrogens and progestins/progesterone with respect to safety and efficacy; special attention is devoted to clinical outcomes in the breast, endometrium, bone, cardiovascular system, and brain. The studies reviewed suggest bioidentical progesterone does not have a negative effect on blood lipids or vasculature as do many synthetic progestins, and may carry less risk with respect to breast cancer incidence. Studies of both bioidentical estrogens and progesterone suggest a reduced risk of blood clots compared to non-bioidentical preparations. Bioidentical hormone preparations have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing menopausal symptoms.

CONCLUSIONS: The author advocates for continued research on bioidentical hormones and concludes there is currently sufficient evidence to support their preferred use over that of their synthetic cousins.

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