

Menopausal hormone therapy: Systemic therapy – types

The main components of systemic menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) are estrogen and progestogens. Other agents include bazedoxifene and tibolone. Availability of individual preparations varies worldwide.

Menopausal hormone therapy is also referred to as hormone replacement therapy or HRT.

The two main types of menopausal hormone therapy (MHT)

- **Estrogen-alone** MHT for **hysterectomized women**
 - Routes of administration for estrogen are oral, transdermal (patches, gels and spray) and subcutaneous (implants)
- **Progestogens** and **progesterone** are **added** to estrogen for **non-hysterectomized women** to reduce the increased risk of endometrial hyperplasia and carcinoma which occurs with estrogen alone
 - Routes of administration for progestogens and progesterone are oral, transdermal, vaginal or via an intra-uterine device

Menopausal hormone therapy does not provide contraception unless intrauterine progestogens are used.

Other agents

- **Tibolone** is a synthetic steroid with estrogenic, progestogenic and weak androgenic activity
 - It is used to manage menopausal symptoms and urogenital atrophy in postmenopausal women
- **Bazedoxifene** is a selective estrogen receptor modulator (SERM) used to prevent postmenopausal osteoporosis
 - It antagonizes the effects of estrogen on the endometrium and is indicated for women in whom progestogen-containing therapy is contraindicated
- **Bio-identical hormones** are plant-derived preparations modified to be structurally identical to human hormones such as estradiol and progesterone
 - There are concerns about unlicensed custom-compounded preparations which have not been approved by government agencies (such as the US Food and Drug Administration or the European Medicines Agency), unlike conventional MHT products

Further information

EMAS (2025). CareOnline. Health at menopause and beyond <https://emas-online.org/guidelines-and-education/#emas-care-online>

NICE (2024). Guideline NG23. Menopause: identification and management <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>