

Hormone implants for hormone replacement therapy (HRT)



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Estradiol hormone implants are a form of HRT (hormone replacement therapy) to treat symptoms of the menopause. They are small crystalline slow release pellets containing body-identical estradiol (oestrogen) that are inserted into the fat under the skin (usually the abdomen/tummy) to slowly release the hormone directly into your blood-stream over a 4-6 month period. Implants are an appropriate treatment for patients where other treatments have proved ineffective at improving menopause symptoms.

Estradiol 25mg and 50mg implants are unlicensed medications (not licensed for use in the UK but can be used by specialists).

If you have not had a hysterectomy you will also need to take a progestogen while using the implants and for up to 3 years after discontinuing the implants (or until estradiol levels are in the postmenopausal range) as the implants can continue to release small amounts of hormone, this protects the womb lining from becoming abnormal.

Implants are usually fitted every 4-6 months. A blood estradiol test must be completed prior to each implant fitting to assess hormone levels to ensure new implants can safely be fitted. Our guidelines follow evidence based safe practice to ensure therapeutic estradiol levels are maintained. If levels are high, your next implant may be delayed. Normal (physiological) estradiol levels range from 300 to over 1000 pmol/l. We would not routinely fit implants if levels exceed 800 pmol/l. Implants cannot be replaced without a recent blood estradiol level.

Estradiol implants should be considered a non-reversible HRT as they cannot be removed once inserted. If you are planning a family within 12 months of treatment this option is not suitable for you.

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Benefits of hormone implants

- improve menopause symptoms in women who have not responded to other forms of hormone replacement therapy or those who have had a surgical menopause
- help to prevent osteoporosis

Risks of hormone implants

Every procedure has risks and benefits and these will be discussed with you in detail prior to having the procedure. For implants these include:

- Inflammation, infection and bruising at the site where the implant(s) are inserted - implants are inserted using sterile precautions so this is not a common issue and antibiotics are rarely needed.
- Rejection of the implant - the implant can work its own way back out of the skin. This is rare and does not prevent implants being used again however your implant cannot be replaced until your next planned appointment.
- Tachyphylaxis - hormones accumulate in the body and can occur rarely after repeated implant fittings. This can be minimised by ensuring your blood levels are assessed 2-3 weeks before any implant fitting the fitting is deferred if levels are too high until they are in the therapeutic range.
- Recurrence of symptoms - this typically occurs towards the end of the implant's life. A 'top-up' of oestrogen in a patch or gel may be prescribed by your doctor. You must stop using this top-up 7 days prior to the blood test to assess your levels.
- Other risks - when blood estradiol levels are maintained within the normal therapeutic range, the risks of blood clots and stroke are comparable with other transdermal oestrogen therapies (gel/patch/spray forms of oestrogen).

Implant fitting procedure

Implants are inserted under the skin, usually in the abdomen (stomach) or in the buttock. With a local anaesthetic to numb the skin, a small incision (cut) is made in the skin. Using a thin hollow instrument the implant is inserted under the skin into the fatty layer. The instrument is removed and soluble stitch(es) are used to close the wound which will dissolve and fall out in 7-10 days. The wound is covered with a sterile dressing which should remain in place for 48-72 hours and the wound kept dry. Patients may experience localised bruising, pain and discomfort at the wound site for a few days after the procedure and simple painkillers will help reduce symptoms. You will be left with a small scar from the incision.

If you would like to find out if hormone implants may help please book an appointment with Dr Katie Barber to discuss your menopause journey and what implants involve in more detail.

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