

Hormone therapy raises cancer risk

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Menopausal women who take hormone combinations for their symptoms are more likely to get an uncommon type of breast cancer much earlier than experts believed.

The new findings, released Monday by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, link lobular breast cancer to combination hormonal therapy used to combat hot flashes, night sweats and other symptoms of menopause, The Seattle Times reported Tuesday.

Lobular breast cancer is uncommon but particularly elusive because the cancer doesn't form lumps in the breast.

Most researchers have assumed it takes five years of combined-hormone therapy before the overall risk of developing breast cancer is elevated significantly. But the new study found women who took estrogen and progestin every day for as few as three years were about three times more likely to develop lobular breast cancer than those who had never taken hormones.

Dr. Nancy Tipton, a gynecologist with Virginia Mason Medical Center, said the study shouldn't change anything for patients who take the lowest possible doses for the shortest possible time.

"Nothing is risk-free. A lot of women really need combination hormones for a while because they're miserable," said Tipton, who estimated that a quarter of her menopausal patients need estrogen-progestin to control their symptoms.

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