

Using Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) in the Acute Porphyrias

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An update from UK Porphyria Medicines Information Service

HRT and acute attacks

Some people with an **acute porphyria** (acute intermittent porphyria, variegate porphyria or hereditary coproporphyria) are at risk of developing acute attacks of porphyria.

These usually start with **pain in the abdomen, back or thighs. Nausea, vomiting and constipation** are also common symptoms. These episodes can be very severe and often require hospitalisation.



Acute attacks can be triggered by a number of different factors including **medications, alcohol, fasting, hormones especially progesterone, illness and stress**. There is a higher risk of developing an acute attack if you:

- have a history of previous acute attacks
- are aged from late teens to early forties
- are female



As women go through menopause, their ovarian function decreases and the hormones **oestrogen and progesterone** fall to low levels.

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) simply replaces these hormones, which helps to reduce menopause symptoms.

Sometimes HRT is also used in **young women** with certain medical conditions.

If you have an acute porphyria, be aware that **HRT may trigger an acute attack**. Only start HRT with the support of a medical professional.



UKPMIS

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Information Service

THE
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Oestrogen and progesterone

HRT can contain oestrogen alone or in combination with progesterone. Although **both oestrogen and progesterone** are thought to trigger acute attacks, oestrogen is thought to be **less likely** to trigger an acute attack than progesterone.



It is often possible to avoid hormones and treat the symptoms of the menopause individually with medications from the **safe drug list**.

If HRT cannot be avoided then medications **without progesterone** are preferred. This approach however usually then requires additional **follow up and monitoring**.

Topical treatments (e.g. gels and creams) are usually considered **safer than oral treatments** (e.g. tablets). This is because less of the medicine is absorbed into the blood when put on the skin.

Precautions to take when prescribed HRT

If you have an acute porphyria and are prescribed HRT, make sure you:

- have **reminded the health care professional** that you have an acute porphyria
- are taking the **lowest possible dose** to manage your symptoms
- **never have a hormonal implant or injection** as these cannot be taken out if an acute attack occurs
- **stop the HRT** and report to your specialist if you get symptoms of an acute attack, such as abdominal pain

The information here is not exhaustive and is specifically for patients with acute porphyria. For more information about HRT treatment and acute porphyria speak to your healthcare provider or call UKPMIS on **029 2184 2251**.

For more information on acute porphyria and SAFE medications, visit www.wmic.wales.nhs.uk/specialist-services/drugs-in-porphyria or call UKPMIS on **029 2184 2251**.

Are you still receiving your annual SAFE drugs list? If not, please call UKPMIS on **029 2184 2251**.