Vaginal Estrogen Use Not Linked to Increased Risk of Cancer

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Previous studies have linked oral estrogen use to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer and stroke. But now, new findings published in the journal Menopause suggest that vaginal estrogen use, which helps to treat menopausal symptoms, doesn't raise the risks of developing such illnesses, reports MedPage Today.

For the assessment, researchers gathered data from the multicenter Women's Health Initiative (WHI) Observational Study and evaluated 45,663 postmenopausal women who were not using systemic estrogen therapy. Women self-reported their estrogen use, but no information about the specific dose or type of vaginal estrogen was collected. In addition, compared with women who didn't use vaginal estrogen, those who did were more likely to be white, of normal weight and college educated and have a higher annual household income.

Findings showed that among postmenopausal women, ages 50 to 79 with an intact uterus who used vaginal estrogen, there were no significant differences in risk for invasive breast cancer, stroke, death, colorectal cancer and venous thromboembolism (a blood clot that starts in the vein) when compared with nonusers. (This also held true for women who previously underwent a hysterectomy.)

What's more, users of vaginal estrogen exhibited a lower risk of coronary heart disease (48 percent), a decreased risk for hip fracture (60 percent) and a significantly lower risk of global index events (conditions that are the leading causes of disease and death in the world), such as high blood pressure.

"The blood levels of estrogen that result from vaginal estrogen use are lower than those resulting from oral estrogen use, so we expected that associations with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer might not be as pronounced with vaginal estrogen as those seen in studies of oral estrogen use," said Carolyn Crandall, MD, an internal medicine physician at the University of California, Los Angeles and one of the study's authors.

According to Crandall, additional research is required to learn more about vaginal estrogen use. She suggested that clinical trials to compare endometrial cancer risk and bone density and fracture risk after long-term use of vaginal estrogens administered via rings, creams or tablets would be extremely useful.

Click here to more about oral contraceptives and their possible link to the risk of long-term cancer.

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