



# Here's What Happened When I Tried HRT for Menopause

Some symptoms improved, but did not outweigh the negative side effects for me to continue

By [Brette Sember](#) | March 25, 2025 | [Perimenopause and Menopause](#)

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After a rocky journey with perimenopause, I finally made it to the other side, hitting [menopause](#) at 53. I often say I think I received defective reproductive equipment and am due a refund: I had a six-week-long cycle, needed fertility drugs to get pregnant, C-sections to give birth, and a D&C for a uterine polyp that caused bleeding when I was supposed to be in menopause. So, I was relieved to have the system shut down and go offline at last.



The first week was punctuated by a lot of nausea, but I noticed that my sense of smell was suddenly stronger, and I realized that it had actually waned over the years. By the fourth day, I felt like my brain fog was starting to improve. | Credit: Getty

But with that came what felt like a rapid descent into aging, including [joint pain](#) (knees and ankles), muscle pain (including nagging neck and shoulder pain), weight gain, dryness everywhere (and I mean everywhere), brain fog, headaches, fatigue and a feeling of not being rested when I woke up. Knee injections, diabetes drugs and physical therapy all seemed like they were going to be my path forward.

In the past few years, there has been an explosion of media coverage about menopause. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT, also called hormone therapy) was [back in the news](#), and all the risks I remembered hearing about years ago (heart attacks, cancer, etc.) were now debunked and the treatment considered very safe. I watched ["The M Factor"](#) documentary (which felt like a hard sales pitch for HRT) and read a lot online.

My gynecologist had never mentioned HRT to me, but I reached out and scheduled a consult. Everyone should discuss their own situation with their own doctor, but mine told me that I could start HRT within the first 5 years of menopause. She said research showed it definitely helped with night sweats, hot flashes and vaginal dryness and indicated it might help with joint and muscle pain, brain fog and fatigue.

## My daughter is a breast oncologist, and she was extremely opposed to me trying HRT.

Her take was that it did not pose a risk for cancer or heart disease and was safe even for someone with a family history of [cancer](#) and heart disease (I had one grandmother with breast and ovarian cancer, one with colon cancer, and my grandfather died of heart disease). She said it was "weight neutral" and should not impact my weight. Her attitude about it was very positive.

I don't just get advice from my own doctor, though. My daughter is a breast oncologist, and she was extremely opposed to me trying HRT. She said she sees so many patients with breast cancer who did HRT that she is suspicious of it despite what the studies say.



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## Getting Started

I shared that with my doctor, who disagreed. She suggested I try it at the lowest dose for a month and see how I felt. She said I could stay on it my entire life if I wanted to, but we would re-evaluate yearly. I could also stop at any point.

She prescribed an [estrogen patch](#) that I would change twice a week and a progesterone pill I would take each night. She warned me that progesterone could make me groggy and said that breast pain was a common side effect but would go away.

I was surprised at how small the patch was, about the size of my fingernail. Learning to apply it was a little tricky since you're not supposed to touch the sticky side with your fingers. Once it was on, I didn't know it was there. The progesterone pill was a smooth little ball, but it felt like a rock in my stomach every night that I took it.

The day after I started, I felt extremely tired. I also began to feel nauseous. I am also taking Zepbound (a GLP-1 [weight loss drug](#)), which caused a lot of nausea when I started it six months prior, and it seemed like the combination of both drugs was a lot for my system.

The first week was punctuated by a lot of nausea, but I noticed that my sense of smell was suddenly stronger, and I realized that it had actually waned over the years (my husband and I had always joked I had a "dog nose."). By the fourth day, I felt like my brain fog was starting to improve. Breast tenderness was becoming noticeable.

## I felt like I was suddenly younger. I was excited to see so many positive changes so quickly.

By the second week, I felt like my breasts were huge swollen watermelons, and they were very painful. I was pretty annoyed to be dealing with that, which felt like a throwback to PMS and pregnancy, things I was so happy to be past. I also gained a few pounds (which was alarming since I was making such good progress with Zepbound). I was very uncomfortable because of the breast pain. I was managing the nausea with ginger gum and tea.

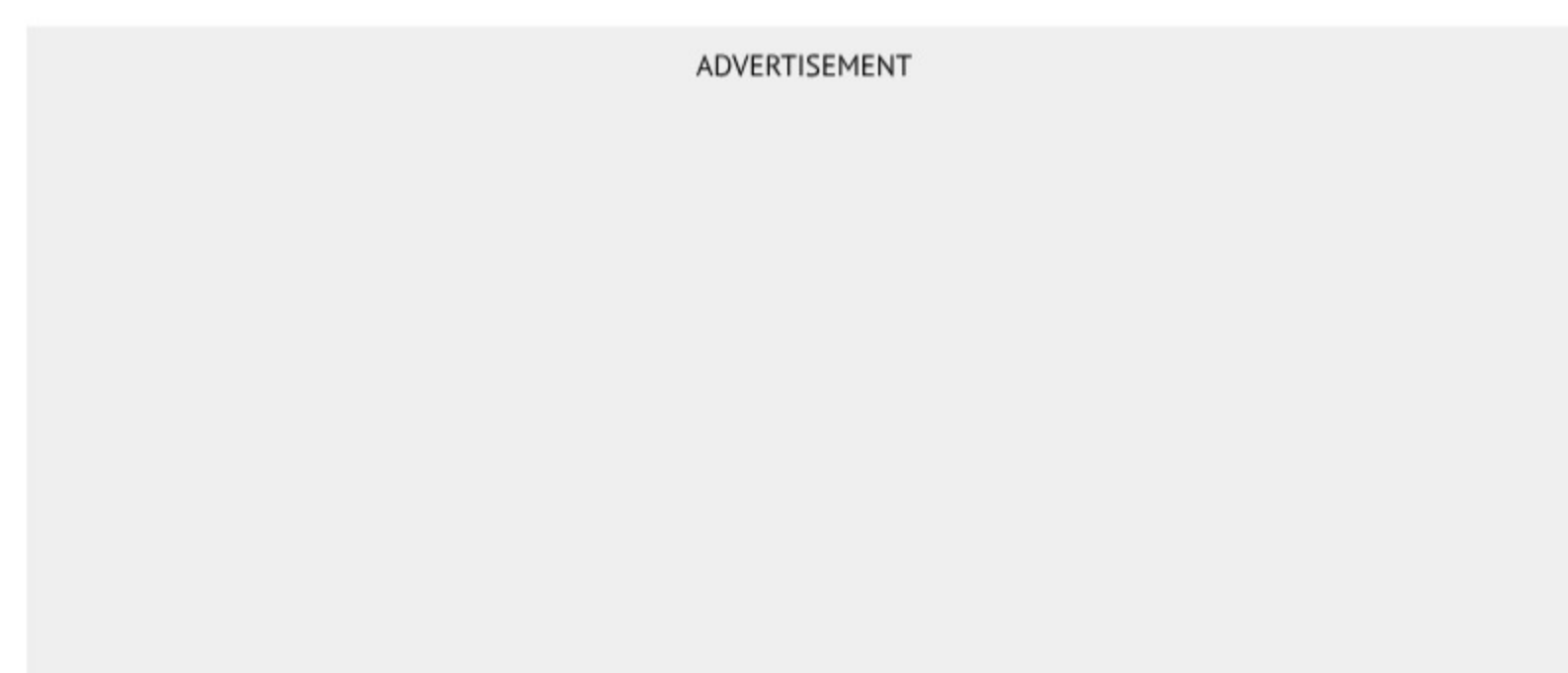
On the plus side, my knees, ankles, neck and shoulder had noticeable improvements (aches and pains were mainly gone), as did the vaginal dryness. I was less tired and felt mentally sharp in a way I hadn't in a long time. I woke up in the morning alert. I felt like I was suddenly younger. I was excited to see so many positive changes so quickly.

By the third week, the breast pain was almost intolerable. I reached out to my doctor who told me it would go away as my body adjusted to the drugs. She had no suggestions or help to offer.

Acid reflux then entered the scene. I'd had a couple of terrible bouts of it in the perimenopause years, and this was not something I wanted to have to medicate for again. My stomach hurt constantly, putting me in a cycle of feeling better when I ate and feeling terrible afterward. I started taking Pepcid to manage it but it was a constant struggle.

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## Taking Stock

The one-month mark hit, and I was completely worn down by the breast pain and the reflux. I couldn't move without my breasts hurting and my stomach was a disaster. I desperately needed relief from both things and even though I liked how the rest of my body felt, it didn't tip the scales enough for me to manage two new problems that were causing me a lot of discomfort. I took off the patch and stopped the pills.

The reflux was gone by the second day. The breast pain decreased and was gone within a week. I lost the weight I'd gained within three days.

## It was nice to feel like I had parts of my old body and brain back, [but] the breast discomfort and having to take yet another pill to manage the reflux tipped the scales for me.

Although I'm not opposed to "better living through pharmaceuticals," and it was nice to feel like I had parts of my old body and brain back, the breast discomfort and having to take yet another pill to manage the reflux tipped the scales for me.

A few weeks later, I am happy with the decision to stop, but disappointed this experiment didn't work out for me.

Yes, I could have asked my doctor for a different prescription — there are other brands and doses, but I felt that since this was the lowest dose available, any change would make things worse. Bottom line, I didn't feel enough change to make it worth the new problems the drugs caused me.

Many women find great relief with these drugs for a while but the improvements I felt didn't outweigh the side effects and whatever risk may be involved.

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**Brette Sember** Brette Sember is an editor, book coach, author and freelancer. She has written 40 books and helped hundreds of authors bring their book dreams to fruition. [Read More](#)

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