

Hormone Pellet FAQs—Women

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Hormone pellets have been used for many years to treat several medical conditions including ovarian and testicular failure. Very popular and approved for use in Europe, pellet therapy has yet to be approved by the FDA for treatment of low hormonal conditions in women. Hundreds of medical studies demonstrate the efficacy and safety of pellets. The convenience and frequently superior results seen with pellet insertion has made their popularity rapidly grow over the past decade in treating ovarian failure/menopause and low testosterone. We are proud to be able to provide this alternative option for treatment. The following information will help answer your questions regarding hormonal pellet therapy.

1. **What are pellets?** Estrogen and testosterone pellets are made from purified hormone which is processed from yams and soy. After placement under the skin, they slowly dissolve into the surrounding subcutaneous fat which is then released into the bloodstream.
2. **How are they placed?** After the skin is numbed, a small incision is made, then a large needle called a trocar is pushed under the skin. The pellets fit inside the trocar then are slid under the skin.
3. **Where are they placed?** We usually insert them under the skin in the lower abdomen. If desired, we can place them in the hip area.
4. **How long do they last?** Typically the pellets will last for 3-6 months. Occasionally, they absorb more quickly and will have to be replaced as soon as 2 months, but sometimes will last 8-9 months. It is hard to predict how long pellets will last in an individual until they have been placed.
5. **Are there any risks?** Any medication has potential risks. There are known risks to estrogen replacement including stroke, heart attack and breast cancer. The studies that describe these risks tend to be poor studies, or use oral estrogen such as Premarin[®]. Transdermal estrogens such as gels, patches and pellets do not seem to have these same risks. If there is a history of blood clots, estrogens of any type should be used with great caution. If you have your uterus, you will need to take progesterone to protect the endometrium, the tissue that lines the uterus. If you take estrogen alone (in any form) you substantially increase the risk of endometrial overgrowth and even cancer. Testosterone use in women may increase cholesterol which could then increase risk of cardiovascular disease. Again, this seems to be more associated with oral synthetic testosterone preparations and not so much with pellets or creams. Some studies show that testosterone use in men may increase the risk of prostate cancer, however, this is still under debate.
6. **What are the advantages of pellet therapy?** There are several, however, the biggest advantages are the ability to achieve higher, more physiologic (i.e. normal) levels of hormones which translates to simply feeling better. The blood levels remain stable throughout the majority of the time after pellet placement--this avoids the peaks and troughs which occur with traditional forms of hormone replacement. Some studies show a decrease rate in breast cancer while others demonstrate no increase in blood clots in women treated with estrogen pellets. In some situations, the costs of pellets may be less than prescription hormones. Pellet therapy also avoids the need to take daily pills or apply gel daily, or deal with patches which may irritate the skin.

7. **How much do pellets cost?** Each pellet costs \$30. Usually 3-5 pellets are required at each insertion depending on age and hormone requirements. These are purchased directly by the patient from Dr. Aziz Pharmacy and are shipped to our office for insertion. Our insertion fee is \$125 (subject to change), which is less than half of what most other facilities charge. We will bill the insertion fee to your insurance along with an office visit charge. Although the office charge is usually covered, the insertion fee is not. In the off-chance that we are reimbursed by your insurance for the insertion, you will be refunded your payment. Please ask us if you have any other questions regarding the billing for pellets.
8. **How will I know when it's time for more pellets?** Trust us—you will know. Basically, your symptoms will begin to return. As soon as you notice this, call so we can get you on the schedule for your next pellet insertion.
9. **Is there a limit on how long pellets can be used?** No. Pellet therapy can be used for many years and there is no age limit.
10. **What can I expect with pellet therapy?**
 - a. We always start pellet doses on the low side, so you may not notice optimal response for 6-9 months while we're trying to figure out what dose and frequency of insertion works best for you. We prefer this approach since too high a dose may result in severe breast tenderness, headaches, water retention, acne, oily skin and hair where you don't want it. Trust us on this one!
 - b. Hormone levels increase gradually from the moment of insertion. It may take 2-4 weeks before you start feeling the full effect. Levels peak around 2 months—that's when we check your blood levels. This helps guide us, in addition to improvement in your symptoms and any side effects, in determining the proper doses of pellets.
 - c. Each pellet insertion will last typically 3-6 months. After several insertions, we'll have an idea of how often you will need pellets, we will then schedule your appointments accordingly. Stress, illness, weight changes, exercise levels and other medication changes (especially thyroid meds) may change how you feel which could require a dosing adjustment. Some patients will even notice a difference based on the location (right/left, abdomen/ thigh) where the pellets are placed.
11. **What else do I need to know?**
 - a. If you still have a uterus (even if you have had an endometrial ablation) you MUST be on some type of progesterone to protect the uterine lining. There are several options which we will discuss. If you are on higher levels of estrogen, we may check an occasional ultrasound of your uterus to monitor the estrogen effect on the uterine lining.
 - b. Estrogen is important for every tissue and organ in a woman's body. Besides hot flash/night sweat relief, you may notice an improvement in sleep, energy, thinking, mood, skin, vaginal health and lubrication, libido, exercise endurance and even weight management. Testosterone helps modulate the estrogen levels, prevents breast tenderness, and improves mood, energy, libido and sexual response and feeling of well-being. In men, it will improve energy, weight control, sexual function and mood, and help prevent diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
 - c. You do not have to "qualify" for pellets. Although traditionally reserved for patients who don't tolerate or are unable to obtain adequate therapeutic response on prescription hormones, anyone who desires the convenience and improved results of pellets may choose this option.
 - d. ★★★★★ *Do not wear white pants* or any clothes that could be ruined by blood to your insertion appointment. Although we do our best, we can't always control bleeding during and/or after insertion. ★★★★★