

Why Use a Troche?

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You have decided to replace your decreasing hormones with natural hormones instead of the synthetic alternatives. That is a good choice! But what is the best way to get the hormones into your body?

If we are going to the effort to replace your hormones with the bio-identical hormones, let's take that a step further and consider how your body was designed to receive the hormones...and the answer is not through your stomach!

A capsule or tablet may be the quick and easy answer, but many of the benefits of natural hormones will be lost as the hormones go through the process of digestion.

Your glands secrete hormones into the local blood supply where they eventually move into the main blood supply that travels throughout your body. This is the way your body is designed to receive hormones; it is the physiologically natural pathway.

When hormones are swallowed, they are exposed to digestive acids and enzymes as they are broken down and are absorbed through the gut wall. Then, like virtually everything absorbed by the digestive process, they are transported directly to the liver in what is called liver first-pass metabolism.

The synthetic hormones generally have a full day's amount of hormone in each tablet or capsule. Swallowing the tablet (or capsule) causes a full twenty four hours worth of hormones to flood the liver. The liver is expecting very small amounts of hormone to be delivered to it over a full 24 hours, not in just a few minutes! Such a large influx of hormone is hard on the liver. Other medications add to the liver's burden and increase the risk of liver toxicity, injury to the liver and gall bladder disease.

No message can be delivered to the liver to tell it that this rapid rise in hormone concentration is short term. The liver seeks to protect you from this hormonal assault. It responds to the fact that your hormone levels are far too high, out of control and potentially damaging to you. The liver begins to make changes to protect you from this danger. The net result is that it affects the way your body has access to the hormones. It certainly affects the estrogen and progesterone you might be taking, but also has undesirable effects on other circulating hormones and chemicals as well. This includes, but is not limited to, thyroid hormone, cortisol, antithrombin III, blood sugar (glucose) interactions with the pancreas and increasing a substance called C-reactive protein. These changes can increase your blood pressure and cholesterol, affect your mood, lower your thyroid and cortisol potential and increases your risk for a stroke, heart attack and development of diabetes.

Today, there are many ways hormones can be delivered to your body; all avoiding the liver first pass that can cause so many problems. These include injections, transdermal (across the skin) and transmucosal (through a mucous membrane) delivery.

Injections have various drawbacks including discomfort, the extra cost of sterile supplies and widely varying hormone levels that do not reflect "natural" levels.

Transdermal delivery of medications has gained rapid popularity during the last 10 or 15 years. Hormones, nitroglycerin and drugs for blood pressure and pain are just some of the different medications in a patch form that are applied to the skin for absorption. However, some women are very sensitive to the adhesives that are used in the patches; other women have trouble getting the patches to adhere to their skin. Add to this that there are no patches that contain natural progesterone; only synthetic progestins.

Creams, suppositories and troches are other forms of transdermal or transmucosal absorption, all of which bypass the digestive system and first-pass metabolism. This is good.

Creams can be very effective, but because of the extreme variation in skin type (thickness, fat content, water content, difficulties in exact measurements), their absorption is erratic and unpredictable from one patient to the next and often require different creams for the different hormones. So not only is the absorption less than ideal, it can be more costly.

Rectal suppositories can be effective and dependable for drug delivery, but lack convenience and may not be in the rectum long enough to be absorbed (you may need to have a bowel movement).

Troches, however, offer the best of all worlds. Troches have regained tremendous popularity for the absorption of medications, especially hormones. They are effective because the lining of the mouth is thin and rich in blood supply.

Troches are small lozenges that dissolve between the cheek and gum or even in the vagina. A well made "Base A" troche provides the best absorption; it dissolves slowly over a period of about 20 to 40 minutes. As it dissolves, the hormones are gradually absorbed into the blood stream, resulting in physiologically natural hormone blood levels. Also, because these are bio-identical to the hormones your body has produced, they are efficiently recognized, utilized, metabolized and excreted by the body. Since your own hormones only last about 10 to 14 hours, your natural hormone replacement should be dosed twice a day to give adequate and sustained blood levels. A word of caution – if you are going to use the troches in the vagina – be certain that they are not flavored with mint! Mint causes a burning sensation in the vagina that you will want to avoid!

Because of the tremendous advantages in consistency, effectiveness and the ability to avoid the digestive process, I strongly recommend troches as the primary dosage form for hormone replacement therapy for both men and women.

And remember, if you are trying to "make it easier" by taking your troches only once a day, instead of the recommended twice a day, you are depriving your body of what it was designed to receive 24 hours a day!