



HRT shortages explained and what you can do

By Kathy Abernethy

Supplies of HRT are at an all-time low. So, if you're trying to manage your menopause symptoms, you might go to pick up your prescription and have to leave empty-handed. Here, one of Peppy's menopause experts explains HRT shortages, and what you can do. HRT shortages, in a nutshell.

Problems with HRT supplies were in the news back in 2018. Now, shortages (although on a smaller scale this time) have been making headlines again. There have even been some reports of women being willing to pay more on social media for a particular product, or sharing gel with friends.

As a result, you may have been to collect your HRT from the pharmacy recently only to be told that they can't source your usual product.

Finding the best HRT for you can take time. There are a variety of HRT brands, strengths and formats including tablets, skin patches, sprays and gels to rub into your skin. This means it can take some trial and error to find the one that works best.

So, finding out that your preferred HRT isn't available and that you'll have to use a different product can be really worrying.

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Information in this article is provided by Kathy Abernethy, Director of Medical Services at Peppy

What is HRT?

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is the use of hormones to treat menopause symptoms. These include oestrogen, progestogen (or progesterone) and sometimes testosterone.

HRT can be used for:

- Natural menopause: if a drop in oestrogen is causing problems and impacting your quality of life.
- Early natural menopause: if you're experiencing the menopause aged 40 or under.
- Surgical menopause: if you start menopause suddenly because your ovaries have been removed.
- Induced menopause: if medical treatment such as cancer therapy has put you into early menopause.

People who are treating their menopause symptoms can choose from a whole range of HRT brands, strengths and formats including tablets, skin patches, sprays and gels to rub into your skin.

Currently, all types of HRT require a prescription from your doctor. However, vaginal oestrogen tablets are currently under review. They may soon be able to be purchased as an [over the counter pharmacy medicine](#).

Why are HRT shortages happening?

There is currently a wholesaler supply problem with some of the most common types of HRT in the UK, with Oestrogel appearing to be the product most in demand.

This has been partly blamed on the increased number of women now taking HRT – particularly in the form of gels and patches. The manufacturers of Oestrogel have warned that high demand meant supplies had become 'depleted'.

Some people are being offered an alternative product such as Sandrena gel, spray or patches. But, there have been some reports about difficulties even sourcing these. However, this is not a nationwide problem; some areas of the UK have been unaffected by the supply issues.

What should you do if you need to switch your HRT?

You can absorb different forms of HRT differently in terms of more or less of your usual product. This means it can take some time to find the right type of alternative HRT that alleviates your symptoms and maintains that relief. So, switching between different types of HRT is not necessarily easy.

If you are taking HRT, speak to your pharmacist well before your prescription runs out to see if your brand is in stock. Your pharmacist can also let you know about similar products that you could try instead.

You may have to go back to your GP and ask them to prescribe an alternative product if your usual prescription isn't available right now. Leave yourself plenty of time, so that you don't run out.

Should you have to temporarily switch to an alternative product from your usual HRT, you can find a [handy conversion sheet](#) on the Women's Health Concern website. This can help you establish the equivalent dose of any type of oestrogen product. Dose equivalents are for tablet, patches, gel forms and spray (Lenzetto). Some people are also being offered Sandrena gel or patches.

If you're switching from one gel HRT to another, absorption should be fairly consistent. You may want to change back to your usual product once it is back in stock. This is completely up to you; you may even find you prefer the new one.