

The Women's Health Research Program Health Bulletin

March 2011

womenshealth.med.monash.edu.au

What's New in the Literature?

Breast cancer rates have gone back to being the same as before women stopped taking HRT

In 2002 vast numbers of women across the world stopped taking HRT because the Women's Health Initiative Study reported that women treated with HRT (oestrogen plus progestin tablets) for three years or more were at increased risk of breast cancer. Researchers in Australia and North America then went on to report breast cancer rates fell by 2004 in conjunction with so many women stopping HRT. NOW, a large Canadian study has just reported that breast cancer rates have risen again, and are no different from 2002.

The study has reported that the rate of diagnosis of breast cancer amongst Canadian women over 40 years of age peaked in 2002, declined from 2002 to 2004 and then rose again from 2004 to 2006. Meanwhile the number of women having mammograms has remained stable.

Thus it was premature to conclude that the fall in breast cancer diagnosis shortly after the Women's Health Initiative Study findings were released was simply due to women stopping HRT, because the use of HRT has remained low and breast cancer rates have risen again to where they were back in 2002.

Reference: *Hormone therapy and incidence of breast cancer* De P, Neutel Cl, Olivotto I, Morrison H. Breast cancer incidence and hormone replacement therapy in Canada. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2010;102:1489-95.

What level of vitamin D is normal?

There has been a huge interest in Vitamin D, everyone seems to be being tested and so many people are being labelled "deficient". The blood test usually done measures "25 hydroxy vitamin D" or 25OHD.

In the past a blood 25OHD level above 50 nmol/L (20 ng/ml) was considered normal. More recently many laboratories are recommending a normal level should be above 75 nmol/L. Now the US Endocrine Society has released an evidence base summary of recommended levels of vitamin D for the general community assuming limited sunlight exposure. It highlights that a target level of 50 nmol/L for 25 OHD should be considered sufficient the majority of the population.

Reference: *Ross AC et al., The 2011 Report on Dietary Reference Intakes for Calcium and Vitamin D from the Institute of Medicine: What Clinicians Need to Know.* *J Clinical Endocrinol Metab* 2010.

Get involved in research

Are you age 55–70 years old and interested in being involved in a study to evaluate if low dose testosterone therapy might enhance learning and memory? To participate you need to be otherwise well and not taking any hormone therapy or antidepressants.

If you would like more information, regarding this and other studies please visit our website womenshealth.med.monash.edu.au or contact the Women's Health Research Program on 03 9903 0820 or by email on womens.health@monash.edu



This is the first of our 2011 monthly women's health bulletins. These are to give you the latest women's health information and update you on how you can be involved in women's health research.

Professor Susan Davis
MBBS, FRACP, PhD
Chair of Women's Health and Program Director