

Estrogen-Progestin Therapy Fails to Slow Atherosclerosis

A recent study found that estrogen-progestin therapy failed to slow the progression of coronary-artery atherosclerosis (plaques in the arteries that feed the heart muscle) in postmenopausal women with the disease.

For their study dubbed the Women's Estrogen-Progestin Lipid-Lowering Hormone Atherosclerosis Regression Trail (WELL-HART), researchers randomly assigned 226 postmenopausal women with known coronary-artery atherosclerosis to one of three groups: a control group that received "usual

care," an estrogen group that received 17 β -estradiol therapy, or an estrogen-progestin group that received the 17 β -estradiol plus medroxyprogesterone.*

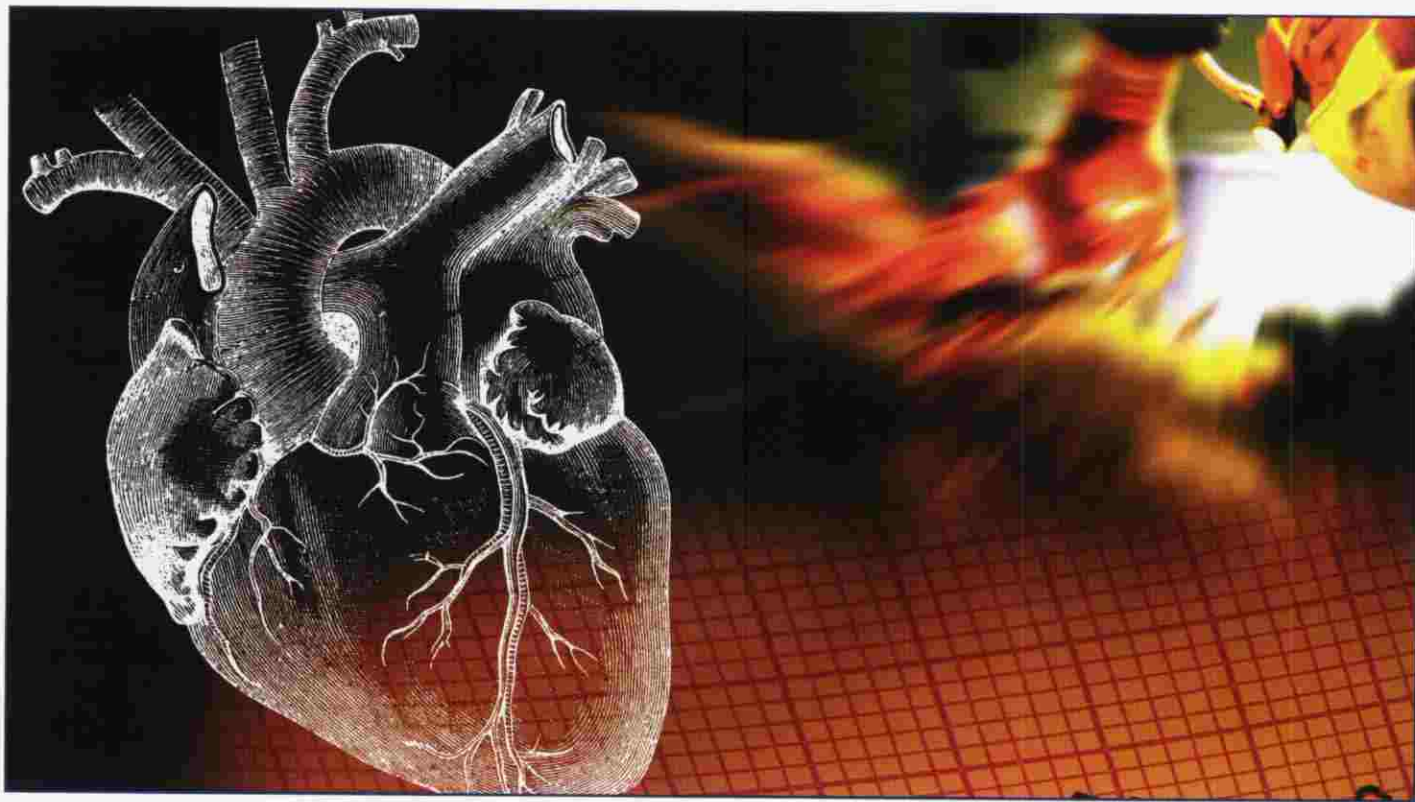
The study found no significant difference between the three groups in the progression of atherosclerosis as seen on the cardiac angiograms.

The researchers noted, however, that these results are "strikingly different" from those of the Estrogen in the Prevention of Atherosclerosis Trial (EPAT) study, in which oral 17 β -estradiol alone slowed thickening of the

carotid artery wall. The time from menopause was 5-10 years less in the EPAT study than in the WELL-HART study, however, which suggests that hormone replacement therapy may play a role in preventing coronary artery disease early after menopause, but may become detrimental after a certain number of years.

Reference

- * Hodis HN, Mack WJ, Azen SP, et al. Hormone therapy and the progression of coronary-artery atherosclerosis in postmenopausal women. *N Engl J Med.* 2003 Aug 7;349(6):535-45.



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