



# Your important role in the WHI Dietary Study

2002

## The WHI Dietary Study in Light of the Historic WHI Hormone Program Findings

In July 2002, the WHI asked women in the Estrogen plus Progestin part of the Hormone Program to stop taking their study pills. The overall risks of taking estrogen plus progestin pills outweighed the benefits. These results were unexpected. Women taking estrogen plus progestin had somewhat more breast cancer, heart attacks, strokes, and blood clots in the lungs and legs than did women taking placebo pills. On the benefits side, women taking estrogen plus progestin had somewhat fewer hip and other fractures and somewhat less colorectal cancer than did women taking placebo pills.

The news has reached many corners of the world. Overnight, millions of people have heard about the WHI Hormone Program findings. Health care providers, scientists, women, and men alike have all heard. The results are calling into question standards of medical practice for postmenopausal women nationally and worldwide. Dietary patterns also need to be tested, and the WHI Dietary Study is doing just that.

This handout responds to commonly asked questions by WHI Dietary Study participants in light of the WHI Hormone Program findings. Feel free to talk about these questions, and others you may have, with WHI staff and other participants.

### Is the Dietary Study continuing?

*Yes!* The Dietary Study is continuing. Attend your clinic visits just as you always have. If you are in the Dietary Change arm of the study, keep coming to sessions, too. Your involvement in the WHI Dietary Study is more important now than ever – whether you are a Comparison or Dietary Change participant. The Hormone Program results show how necessary studies like the WHI are to clear up women's health issues. In the Dietary Study, we need to know if a low-fat, high fruit, vegetable, and grain dietary pattern will reduce a woman's risk of breast cancer, colorectal cancer, and heart disease. We look forward to continuing with you to find these answers.

### Why is it more important than ever to continue the Dietary part of the WHI?

Answers are needed to address alternatives, such as diet, to estrogen-plus-progestin therapy for postmenopausal women with a uterus. What is

the role of diet in health? Does a low-fat, high fruit, vegetable, and grain dietary pattern reduce a woman's risk of breast cancer? Colorectal cancer? Heart disease? We need the science of the WHI Dietary Study to answer these questions.

Some of you in the Dietary Study are also in one of the Hormone Studies (Estrogen plus Progestin or Estrogen-Alone). Some of you are also in the Calcium and Vitamin D Program, and some are in all three WHI clinical trials. Your participation in the WHI makes it possible to explore the health effects of these combinations of treatments. Thanks to you, WHI will contribute more than any previous study in history to what is known about diet and breast cancer, colorectal cancer, heart disease, and bone fractures in postmenopausal women.

**Please continue your WHI participation!**

~ ~ *Continued on other side.*



## **Why are the Comparison and Dietary Change groups in the WHI Dietary Study both important?**

Having both Comparison and Dietary Change groups allows us to compare results between a group of women who are changing their diet (Dietary Change) and a similar group not making these WHI changes (Comparison). In this way, we can take into account the life changes that women make naturally, regardless of their WHI activities. Having two groups also accounts for changes that happen normally as women age. The Comparison and Dietary Change groups are equally important! Having both groups gives us the strongest science.

## **What if I'm also in the Calcium and Vitamin D Program?**

Please continue with the Calcium and Vitamin D Program, if you are in that study. We need to learn whether calcium and vitamin D supplements decrease the risk of hip and other fractures and cancers of the colon and rectum. See the handout, *Your important role in the Calcium and Vitamin D Program*.

## **What if I'm also in the Estrogen-Alone Study?**

Please continue taking your study pills as before. The balance of benefits and risks remains uncertain for women without a uterus who are taking estrogen alone compared to placebo. Following the early release of the Estrogen plus Progestin study results, it became clear that millions of women across the country, and their physicians, are more eager than ever to learn the overall results of the Estrogen-Alone study when it is completed. To get the most accurate results

possible, it is important that Estrogen-Alone study participants continue to take their study pills, unless they have a medical or other reason that requires stopping the pills. Be assured that we will notify you immediately if any findings that you should be aware of emerge before the Estrogen-Alone study is scheduled to end.

## **How do these results apply to me if I'm taking or thinking about taking hormones on my own?**

We encourage you to talk with your health care provider about questions you may have related to your own health care. We have a special packet of information specifically about the Estrogen plus Progestin study findings. We can give this packet to you or, if you'd like, send it directly to your provider. Based on the information in the packet, you and your health care provider can talk about what's best for you.

## **How can I find out more?**

You can find more information on the study website (<http://www.whi.org>). WHI scientists will also keep looking at the data over the coming weeks and months. As results become available, we will inform you through newsletters and updates to the study website.

## **Thank you!**

Thank you for taking part in this landmark study of women's health. The time and effort you have given, and continue to give, to the WHI makes it possible to answer many important health questions for postmenopausal women in the United States and throughout the world. We have more work to do and hope that you will continue with us in this effort.

