The risk comparison

Absolute numbers, side by side. The context that is usually missing.

HOW TO READ THIS

All figures are per 1,000 women aged 50 to 59, over five years. The baseline is what happens anyway. Everything else is the change on top of that baseline. These are absolute numbers, not relative risk, which is the way the 2002 headlines were reported and the reason they sounded so alarming.

PER 1,000 WOMEN AGED 50 TO 59, OVER 5 YEARS	BREAST CANCER CASES	CHANGE
Baseline, no HRT	23	—
Combined HRT (oestrogen and progestogen)	27	+4
Oestrogen only HRT (after hysterectomy)	19	−4
Combined oral contraceptive pill	27	+4
Two or more units of alcohol daily	28	+5
Current smoker	26	+3
Overweight or obese	47	+24
2.5 hours moderate exercise weekly	16	−7

What this actually shows

- Oestrogen only HRT is associated with fewer cases, not more
- Being significantly overweight is associated with roughly six times the additional risk of combined HRT
- Two glasses of wine a night is associated with slightly more additional risk than combined HRT
- Regular exercise moves the number down by more than combined HRT moves it up

Three things the headlines left out

- Mortality from breast cancer is not increased with HRT
- Women who take HRT have reduced overall mortality compared with women who do not
- Maintenance of bone density with reduced fracture risk is a proven benefit, not a possible one

> **ON ACCURACY**
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> These figures come from British Menopause Society materials, which note that the infographic is under statistical review following the updated NICE guideline of November 2024. The numbers may be refined. The shape of the picture is well established.

NOT MEDICAL ADVICE. Educational content only. Many symptoms have causes other than perimenopause, including thyroid disease, anaemia and diabetes. Please speak to your GP about anything that concerns you. · Module 2 · navigare-vela.com