



Norethisterone and the risk of Venous Thromboembolism



North of England
Commissioning Support

Partners in improving local health

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The following pathways on Map of Medicine recommend the option of prescribing norethisterone 5mg (also providing links to Red Whale information), in addition to other licensed indications:

- Heavy menstrual bleeding.
- Abnormal bleeding.
- Post-coital and inter-menstrual bleeding.

Norethisterone 5mg should be avoided in women at increased risk of Venous Thromboembolism (VTE).

Further information:

- Norethisterone is partially metabolised to ethinyloestradiol (EE).
- The conversion is approximately 4micrograms of EE for every 1 mg oral norethisterone. (1)
- Conversion to EE has only been demonstrated at norethisterone doses of 5 mg or more. (2)
- As the norethisterone-containing progestogen only pill, combined hormonal contraceptive and hormone replacement therapy preparations contain less than 5mg, this risk is unlikely to apply. (1)
- Alternative to delay menstruation (unlicensed) - Medroxyprogesterone acetate 10mgs three times daily. (3,4)
- Drug tariff prices (5) – 42 x norethisterone 5mg tablets = £3.12
42 x medroxyprogesterone 10mg tablets = £10.34
- Summaries of product characteristics for different manufacturers of norethisterone vary in their contra-indications, however the following are generally recognised as VTE risk factors (6):
 - Positive personal or family history (VTE in a sibling or a parent at a relatively early age).
 - Age.
 - Obesity.
 - Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).
 - Prolonged immobilisation.
 - Major surgery or trauma.
 - Patients with a history of VTE or known thrombophilic states.
- Discuss the risks and benefits of recommended treatment options to help women decide which one is right for them.

In some cases a patient may wish to delay menstruation due to a holiday or special events such as a wedding, sporting competition etc. If a clinician feels this is appropriate and wishes to prescribe, then this should be done via a private prescription as it is considered a lifestyle choice rather than the treatment of a medical condition. However, prescribing for contraception and for the treatment of other medical conditions should be via NHS prescription. (7)

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Have you seen the NECS Medicines Optimisation website?

<http://medicines.necsu.nhs.uk/>



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References

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2. Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health. Progestogen-only Pills Clinical Effectiveness Unit March 2015 (Updated January 2016).
3. Pearl from Red Whale. Menstruation: postponing periods. June 2016
4. Diana Mansour. Safer Prescribing of Therapeutic Norethisterone for Women at Risk of Venous Thromboembolism. *Fam Plann Reprod Health Care* 2012;**38**:148–149. doi:10.1136/jfprhc-2012-100345
5. Drug Tariff, July 2017.
6. Summaries of product characteristics. Accessed at www.medicines.org.uk . July 2017
7. NECS Self care and OTC product guidance. Accessed at <http://medicines.necsu.nhs.uk/self-care-and-otc-product-guidance/> . August 2017

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