

Hormone Studies: What Went Wrong?

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For nearly nine months, doctors and researchers have been struggling with an intractable problem: how could two large high-quality studies come to diametrically different conclusions about menopause, hormone therapy and heart disease?

The question arose in July, when scientists saw data from a large federal study called the Women's Health Initiative, which was ended early when it became clear that a widely used hormone-replacement drug, Prempro, had risks, including heart attacks, that exceeded its benefits.

That finding directly contradicted previous studies showing that the hormones reduced heart disease risk -- in particular, the Nurses' Health Study, a large research effort that has been going on for years.