

Managing Menopause

Menopause is a stage in a women's life. It starts when a woman stops having monthly periods for 12 months in a row.

Estrogen is a hormone made by the ovaries. For several months before menopause, less estrogen is made by the ovaries. As the estrogen decreases, body changes and the signs of menopause occur.

Menopause occurs:

- As a natural part of aging
- When the ovaries are removed
- When ovaries are changed by radiation or chemotherapy
- When less estrogen is made by the body

Signs

Many women have uncomfortable signs. Often these improve over time. Talk with your doctor about your body changes because there are treatment options and because these changes may be signs of other health problems.

Common signs of menopause are:

- Changes in menstrual cycle or periods
- Hot flashes or warm flush feeling and sweating
- Problems sleeping
- Mood changes
- Headaches
- Feeling anxious
- Vaginal dryness
- Lack of sex drive or painful intercourse
- Dryness of the skin or hair

Signs to Report to Your Doctor

If you have any of these signs, call your doctor's office. You may need to be seen to start treatment or to find out if the problem may be caused by something other than menopause.

- Irregular bleeding
- Chronic vaginal discharge
- Vaginal itching, burning or irritation
- Urinary frequency and burning
- Anxiety or depression that affects sleep, relationships and work routines

Ways to Manage Your Signs

Talk to your doctor about ways to manage your signs of menopause. Some treatments have side effects to consider.

To help manage hot flashes:

- Avoid things that trigger flashes such as:
 - ▶ Strong emotions
 - ▶ Tight clothing
 - ▶ Heat
 - ▶ Caffeine foods and drinks such as chocolate, coffee, tea and soft drinks
 - ▶ Alcohol
 - ▶ Spicy foods with spices such as cayenne or cinnamon
- Stay cool
 - ▶ Sleep in a cool room
 - ▶ Use fans during the day
 - ▶ Dress in layers. Remove pieces of clothing at first sign of flush.
- Breathe deep, slow and with your abdomen to help you relax. Breathe about 6 to 8 breaths each minute. Try this for 15 minutes in the morning and the evening.
- Add soy foods to your diet each day like soy milk or tofu.

- Talk to your doctor or dietitian before making changes to your diet or adding vitamins or herbs. Some foods and herbs such as, uncooked Mexican yams, Ginseng root, vitamin E, multivitamin with B and C complex and zinc have natural sources of estrogen to help decrease hot flashes.
- Exercise each day for 30 minutes or more.
- Find or create a support group.

To help with sleep:

- Try to stay cool at night. Keep the room cool and wear lightweight clothes.
- Limit or avoid sleeping pills.
- Exercise 30 minutes each day.
- Avoid caffeine or alcohol in the evening.
- Take a warm bath or shower at bedtime or after waking up at night.
- Try cereal and milk at bedtime or after waking.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends.
- Avoid late meals and filling snacks before going to bed.

To help your moods or anxious feelings:

- Breathe deep, slow and with your abdomen.
- Use guided imagery or relaxation exercises on tapes, DVDs or CDs.
- Learn to use biofeedback.
- Avoid tranquilizers.
- Join a support group.
- Seek counseling or other help if needed.

To help with vaginal dryness or sexual problems:

- Try lubricants and creams during intercourse to help with vaginal dryness or painful intercourse. A water based lubricant will not break down the latex in condoms.

- Learn more about other products – their purpose, side effects and how to use them safely. Talk to your doctor about products such as:
 - ▶ Estrogen creams to reduce soreness
 - ▶ Testosterone creams to increase sex drive
 - ▶ Products that help restore vaginal moisture and comfort
- Wear cotton underwear.
- Do Kegel exercises each day to strengthen the muscles that control the bladder.
- Use more foreplay and stimulation to boost natural lubrication.
- Communicate with your partner about your physical changes and feelings.

To help with dry skin and hair:

- Put lotion on dry skin 2 times each day. Do not use lotions with heavy perfumes or alcohol. They can cause more drying.
- Brush your hair often to help spread your hair's natural oils.
- Use hair conditioner or moisturizer each time you wash your hair.
- Limit your time in the sun and use sunscreen with at least 45 SPF every day. Wear a hat or head covering.
- Limit use of chemicals on your hair that dry your hair.

Medicine for Menopause

There are medicines that can help with signs of menopause but many have side effects. Talk to your doctor about the risks, benefits and the best options for your specific needs.

- **Hormone Replacement Therapy:**
 - ▶ **Estrogen** may treat signs of menopause, help prevent heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis. It also can increase your risk for other diseases so it may not be a good choice for some women. Estrogen comes in pill form or as a patch that you put on your skin.

- ▶ **Progestin** may treat signs of menopause and can help prevent bone loss, called osteoporosis, and uterine cancer. When taking progestin it is normal to continue or start having periods. Progestin comes in pill form or as an injection. If you have had your uterus removed, you do not need to take progestin.
- ▶ **Estrogen and Progestin** can be taken together.
- **Clonidine** is a drug used to treat high blood pressure but also helps ease hot flashes in some women. It comes in pill form or as a patch you put on your skin.
- **Bellergal** helps ease hot flashes but can cause other uncomfortable side effects such as dry mouth, blurred vision and sedation.
- **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI)** are a group of medicines that treat depression or anxiety. In low doses, some of the medicines in this group have been helpful in easing hot flashes.

Other Treatments

You may benefit from other treatments to manage the stress of menopause. Many women try herbs, vitamins or dietary supplements. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist before using any of these because they may not be safe options for you. Learn the risks or benefits for your health. There may be side effects or interactions from using these along with your other medicines or treatments.

Some women find meditation, massage, acupuncture, exercise and other treatments bring relief. These may also help with overall health and wellbeing.

During menopause and after, women have a greater risk for heart disease and osteoporosis. This is linked to the changes in hormones. You can take steps to lessen your risk and stay healthy.

Your Health

To lower your risk of heart disease and osteoporosis and improve your overall health:

- Do not smoke or use tobacco products.
- Limit alcohol to 1 drink each day.

- Eat a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
- Eat foods high in calcium, vitamin D or take a supplement each day.
- Limit salt, cholesterol and fat in your diet.
- Limit caffeine.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise 30 minutes each day. Walking and muscle building are good choices.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns about menopause or treatment for your signs.