

August 2006 Health Bulletin

This publication compiled and edited by the H.E.E.L. Program
(Health Education through Extension Leadership) Staff

Cooperative Extension Service



What You Should Know About Menopause

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a normal stage in a woman's life when she has not had a menstrual period for one year. Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, but is different for each woman. Until menopause is complete, when you have not had a period for 12 months, there is still a chance you could become pregnant.

What are the symptoms of menopause?

Symptoms may appear 3-5 years before your last menstrual period, a time known as *perimenopause*, and generally resolve within a few years after menopause. Menopause symptoms may include:

- * Hot flashes and skin flushing – lasting 30 seconds to 5 minutes
- * Night sweats
- * Problems sleeping
- * Mood swings including irritability, depression, and anxiety
- * Irregular menstrual periods
- * Spotting (of blood) in between periods
- * Vaginal dryness and painful sexual intercourse
- * Decreased sex drive
- * Vaginal infections
- * Urinary tract infections

Who needs treatment for menopausal symptoms?

Not every woman needs treatment for menopause. Women with troubling symptoms may talk to their doctor about Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved medications for the relief of hot flashes, night sweats, or vaginal dryness.

What prescription treatments are available to treat menopause?

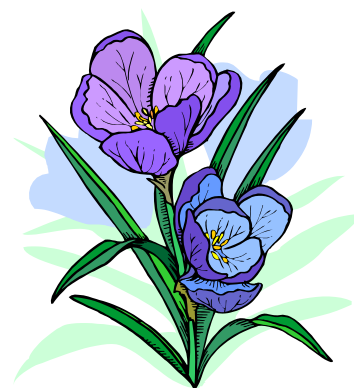
Hormone therapy (HT), the use of estrogen and progestin or estrogen alone, is sometimes used to treat the symptoms of menopause. HT treatments come as pills, patches, vaginal creams, gels, and rings. ***HT should be used at the lowest effective dose for the shortest time possible.*** Talk with your doctor every year about whether you should continue HT.

There are non-hormonal prescription drugs that may be helpful in treating the symptoms of menopause, such as low doses of antidepressants, which your doctor may consider.

What over-the-counter treatments are available to treat menopause?

Phytoestrogens, or plant estrogen, are found in soybeans, cereals, and vegetables. Herbal supplements including black cohosh, soy, and red clover contain phytoestrogens. Other herbals that have been used to treat menopausal symptoms include dong quai, evening primrose oil, flaxseed, and chaste berry. ***Available research***

suggests that phytoestrogens and other supplements do not improve hot flashes or other menopausal symptoms.



What are the benefits and risks of using hormones for menopause?

Hormone therapy is effective for relieving troublesome symptoms of menopause and may reduce your risk of osteoporosis and colon cancer. However, hormone therapy may increase the risks of heart disease, stroke, blood clots, and breast cancer. You should not take hormone therapy if you have a history of these conditions.

Are herbal estrogens safer than hormone therapy?

No. Herbal supplements are not regulated by the FDA and are not endorsed by the government for treating menopause. Herbal supplements may have estrogen-like effects and may carry the same risks as hormone therapy.

What can be done to relieve menopausal symptoms?

- * Dress lightly and in layers.
- * Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and spicy foods.
- * Practice slow, deep breathing whenever a hot flash starts.
(Try taking 6 breaths per minute.)
- * Drink a cold glass of water or juice.
- * Use a portable fan.
- * Use relaxation techniques like yoga, tai chi, or meditation.
- * Remain sexually active to preserve elasticity of your vagina.
- * Use water-based lubricants during sexual intercourse.

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*Double the
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*Activities such as
yoga and tai-chi
can help with
relaxation to
relieve
menopausal
symptoms. They
can also improve
fitness by
increasing
flexibility and
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