

A Nonhormonal Approach to Menopause

This handout will teach you about lifestyle changes to promote long-term health and to relieve menopause symptoms. The key is to have a healthy mind and body.

Menopause

Menopause refers to the end of menstrual periods. The average age is 51. Your genes and family history often play a role in the age you reach menopause. Other factors include:

- Smoking
- Prior removal of the ovaries
- Chemo or radiation treatments

Symptoms

Symptoms of menopause can vary. They may occur slowly over time while hormone levels change. For some women, the onset of symptoms can be sudden and severe. Lifestyle, coping methods, and stress may also play a role in how you can manage these symptoms. The symptoms include:

- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Irregular menstrual bleeding
- Muscle aches and pains
- Trouble sleeping
- Mood swings
- Vaginal dryness and itching
- Pain with sex
- Loss of urine with coughing, sneezing, or laughing
- Frequent vaginal and urinary tract infections

You may prefer to try to manage your symptoms through diet and lifestyle changes and medicine. If your symptoms are a problem for you, talk to your health care team. They will help you decide if hormone therapy is an option.

Other Types of Therapy

Therapy can be used to relieve symptoms.

Options include:

- Megavitamins
- Massage therapy
- Acupuncture
- Biofeedback
- Relaxation
- Healing touch
- Herbal medicine

Menstrual Changes

You may have noticed a change in your normal cycle over the past few months or years. Very few women have an abrupt end to their menstrual cycle without symptoms. It may be light, heavy, or occur more often. You may miss a cycle for a few months and then start again. If you have received chemo, your cycle may have stopped or occurred unevenly. The younger the age you receive chemo, the more severe the symptoms or menstrual changes.

Herbal Products

We do not know how herbal products work in the body. We do not know how herbs may work with or against each other or other medicines. Large amounts may be harmful.

You should only use herbal products under the care of their health care team. Read the list below to help guide you.

- Do not take while pregnant or breast/chest feeding.
- Do not take a large amount of any one herbal product.
- Only buy products when the plants and their amounts are listed on the package (may still be unsafe).
- Use the advice of herbalists or your health care team when choosing

these products.

- Tell your health care team if you are using both prescription and herbal products.

Hot Flashes or Night Sweats

The hot flash or night sweat is a sudden onset of warmth in the face or neck. You may notice a short period of rapid heart rate. Your skin may appear flushed and you may begin to sweat. You may feel dizzy or have headaches. Causes of hot flashes are listed.

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Spicy foods
- Hot drinks
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Warm setting
- Synthetic clothing

Tips for Dealing with Hot Flashes and Night Sweats

Tips to reduce hot flashes:

- Exercise 30 - 40 minutes daily.
- Each day try to relax and meditate.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and spicy foods.
- Use only cotton clothing or clothing that “breathes” and wear in layers.
- Avoid being in a warm area.

Vitamins

Vitamin E - 400 - 800 IU a day may help with these symptoms. It may take 6-8 weeks for relief.

Good food sources include wheat germ oil, corn oil, soybean oil, soybeans, sunflower seeds, sweet potatoes, asparagus, peanuts, almonds. Vitamin C will help you absorb vitamin E.

If symptoms are not relieved, add: Vitamin B₆ - 200 mg daily. It may take 6-8 weeks

before you notice any changes.

Prescription Medicines

Clonidine – Use a 0.1 mg patch and change it once a week. Side effects are dry mouth, constipation, feeling drowsy, low blood pressure, or severe rebound high blood pressure.

Bellergal -S[®] –Take 1 tablet at bedtime. This is for short term use only.

Paxil[®] –Take 10mg. It is a SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) antidepressant.

Zoloft[®] – Take 25 – 50mg. It is a SSRI antidepressant.

Effexor[®] –Take 37.5 mg or cut the tablet in half. It is an antidepressant.

Herbs

Ginseng

Uses: To reduce vaginal dryness and hot flashes and may increase energy and improve concentration.

Dosage: Take two 100mg capsules with 4% active ingredient; or one cup of tea made by steeping one teaspoon of dried herb 10-15 minutes.

Side effects are increased blood pressure, headache, vomiting, insomnia, nosebleed, endometrial growth and bleeding. If you notice unusual bleeding, see your health care team.

Avoid ginseng if you are taking aspirin, ibuprofen, or drugs to prevent blood clotting such as warfarin.

Warning: Do not use ginseng if you have been told not to use estrogen or are taking an antidepressant.

Black Cohosh

Dosage: Take 40mg a day. It may take 3 - 4 weeks before you notice a response. Do not use it longer than 6 months at any time. Allow 2-3 weeks between uses. The best brand is Remifemin®.

Warning: Do not use black cohosh if you have been told not to use estrogen, have high blood pressure, or have heart problems.

Chasteberry

Uses: It may help reduce hot flashes, night sweats, headaches, heart tremors. Also, vaginal drying and thinning, or treat PMS.

Dosage: Take 20mg a day. It may reduce sex drive or cause a rash.

Oil of Evening Primrose

Uses: It may help to relieve hot flashes.

Dosage: Take 80 – 100mg a day.

Phytoestrogens (Isoflavones)

Uses: These are found in plants such as legumes. They have a structure close to estrogen. It may help to relieve hot flashes.

Dosage: Take 30 – 50mg a day. Do not take more than 100mg. Include foods in your diet that add isoflavones at least 3 times a week to help reduce symptoms.

Food sources are soybeans and soy-based foods. Isoflavones may not be found in soy products that are processed such as soy burger, soy hot dogs, soy sauce, etc.

Other foods that contain isoflavones are Mexican yams, alfalfa, garlic, celery, sprouted green peas, black and green beans, cashews, peanuts, almonds, flax seeds, and whole grains such as wheat, oats, corn, brown rice, and citrus fruits. One cup of soybeans = 300mg isoflavones.

There are many new products on the market that contain isoflavones in tablet form. These include Promensil® and Estroven® to name two. They are best used by the body when taken along with at least 20mg of soy protein, i.e. soy milk. There is some concern that taking them in a concentrate form may harm tissues in the body.

If you wish to increase your soy intake, review *Health Facts for You* #366, “Adding Soy to Your Diet.”

Warning: Do not use phytoestrogens in excess of normal dietary intake if you have been told not to use estrogen products.

Acupuncture

It may reduce or get rid of hot flashes, muscle aches and joint pain.

Massage and Relaxation Therapy

It may reduce hot flashes.

Fatigue and Depression

Fatigue and depression are frequent symptoms. A lack of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep will often cause fatigue. This may lead to increased tension, trouble coping with daily routines, becoming more irritable and feeling “blue.”

Tips for Dealing with Fatigue and Depression

Nutrients

Calcium

Uses: This can provide a calming effect.

Dosage: Use 1500mg daily, split into at least two doses, after meals and at bedtime.

Melatonin

Uses: It controls the sleep-wake schedule (jet lag). It may help shorten the time it takes to fall asleep. Side effects are decreased

fertility, hypothermia, and eye damage. High doses may cause extreme sleepiness, confusion, and headache the next morning. Long term effects are unknown.

Vitamin B Complex

Uses: It helps promote a restful state.

Dosage: Take as directed on label.

Herbs

Valerian Root (Passion Flower)

Uses: It has a calming effect. It may ease tension and reduce irritability.

Doses: Use capsules (1-1.5% valtrate or 0.8% valeric acid); 450 – 900mg a daily at bedtime. Long term effects are unknown. Side effects are headache, uneasiness, insomnia, and heart palpitations.

Kava Kava

Uses: It may reduce anxiety, insomnia, and pain.

Dosage: Take 50 - 240mg a day.

Drug interactions: Kava interacts with alcohol and psychoactive medicines. Also, it may cause slowed motor reflexes and skin disorders.

Hops

Uses: It is a sleep aid.

Dosage: Take as directed. There are no known side effects.

Chamomile or Catnip

Uses: It has a calming effect and can be used as a sleeping aid.

Dosage: It can be purchased as a tea. Side effects are abdominal cramps, tongue thickness, swelling of lips, hives, blockage of airway, mild allergic if you are allergic to

ragweed.

Ginseng

Uses: Boosts energy and relieves slight depression.

Dosage: Take two 100mg capsules daily that contain a 4% active ingredient. You can purchase it in capsules, drops, teabags, or dried herbs. To make a tea, use one teaspoon of dried herb and steep it for 10-15 minutes, once per day.

Warning: If you have been told not to use estrogen, you should not use this herb.

Chasteberry

Uses: It may reduce symptoms of PMS and depression.

Dosage: Use it in capsule form once a day or steep a pinch of powder 10-15 minutes to make one cup of tea.

St John's Wort

Uses: It may ease slight or moderate depression, anxiety or nervousness.

Dosage: Take 2 – 4g. per day. It may cause stomach upset and sensitivity to light in high doses. Do not use with antidepressants. Avoid foods high in tyramine or tryptophan.

Ginkgo Biloba

Uses: It may help with depression, mild memory loss and dizziness.

Dosage: Take 120 – 160mg a day split into a few doses. It may take 4-6 weeks before you notice effects. It may cause mild GI upset (rare), or headache. Do not take with aspirin, ibuprofen, or drugs to prevent blood clotting or seizures. It may affect clotting factors. The dose may need to be altered if you use insulin.

Exercise

Exercise will help to form better sleep habits. It will also help treat mild depression.

Exercise may help you to sleep better if done daily for 20 – 40 minutes. You should choose aerobic exercises such as:

- Brisk walking
- Hiking
- Jogging
- Aerobic dance
- Biking
- Swimming
- Racket sports
- Cross-country skiing

You should take a brisk walk of 2-3 miles, 3-4 times a week. Your goal should be to walk about one mile in 15 minutes. Avoid exercise within two hours of bedtime.

Other Options

Relax before bedtime. Drink warm milk, listen to soft music or read. Do something that helps calm your body and allow it to get ready for rest. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, chocolate and tobacco.

Create a set of habits and follow them on a routine basis.

- Go to bed only when you are sleepy.
- Do not stay in bed if you are not sleepy. Get up and move to another room and read, watch TV, or do some other quiet activity.
- Use the bedroom only for sleeping and sex. Don't work, eat, or watch TV in the bedroom.
- Keep the bedroom comfy and quiet.
- Do not nap during the day if this is not a normal thing that you do.
- Take a hot bath (not a shower) an hour or two before bedtime.

DHEA

Uses: It improves mood, energy, and sex drive. Lowers the effects of stress hormones, boosts fat loss, preserves muscle mass and strengthens the immune system.

Dosage: Take 5 – 50mg a day. May cause acne, hair growth, low energy, irritability, trouble sleeping, headache, irregular menstrual cycle, increased eye pressure, lipid changes, and rapid heart rate.

Testosterone

Uses: It maintains muscle mass, lowers total cholesterol, and boosts energy and sex drive. In high doses, it may cause harmful cholesterol levels, psychological problems, infertility, and acne. It may cause an increased risk for stroke. It must be prescribed by your doctor.

Vaginal Changes

The vagina becomes narrow and shorter. The lining becomes thinner, drier, and more fragile. Dryness may cause itching and pain. Sex may cause pain. Using a lubricant can help. You may have some bleeding after sex. The outer area is also more sensitive to contact.

The pH of the vagina will change. This can upset the normal bacterial balance. You may have fewer problems with yeast but more bacterial infections. Treatments for yeast will not help these types of infections. See your health care team if you have drainage, odor, burning, and itching.

Tips to Relieve Vaginal Symptoms

Hygiene

Wash the vaginal area with mild soap and water. Avoid douches, perfumed oils, soaps, tampons and pads. Ointments such as Bag Balm® may help relieve irritation.

Moisturizers

Gels and creams may be used two or three times a week at night to restore moisture to the lining. They last longer than lubricants. It may take two months or more before you notice an effect. Common brands are Replens[®] and Gynemoistrin[®].

Lubricants

You may choose creams, gels, liquids, or suppositories. These products should help reduce pain from dryness. Frequent sex can often be helpful to maintain vaginal health. Common brands of lubricants are K-Y[®] jelly, Surgilube[®], Astroglide[®], Vagisil[®], and Liquid Silk[®].

Vitamin E

Vitamin E capsules may be broken and the contents smeared onto the vaginal lining and outer area for added moisture.

Bladder Changes

With age, bladder problems may occur due to lower hormone levels. The muscles of the pelvic floor can become relaxed. If you have had a child or have gained weight, this could also add to your risk for bladder problems. Leakage of urine is a common complaint. You may notice that you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh, lift heavy objects, or exercise.

You may notice the feeling that you need to “go now” and may not be able to make it to the bathroom. You may notice the need to pass urine more often. These symptoms along with pain can be signs of a bladder infection. If you are having symptoms, talk to your health care team.

Tips to Reduce Bladder Problems

Hygiene

Keep the genital area clean and dry. Wash with mild soap and water. Empty your

bladder and wash after sex. Always wipe from front to back after using the toilet. Wear cotton underwear. Avoid perfumed products which may irritate the genital area.

Drink Liquids

Drinking plenty of liquids flushes your bladder and dilutes your urine. Try to drink most liquids before supper to avoid nightly trips to the bathroom. Limit large amounts of caffeine and diet sodas.

Kegel Exercises

Use to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor. Working these muscles may help prevent bladder leaks and improve sex.

The muscle is easy to locate when you void. Just squeeze it to stop urine flow and release it to restart. Pull up and inwards. You may do these at any time of the day. Once you have located the muscle, do not perform this exercise while voiding. Below are other techniques to strengthen this muscle.

1. Contract the muscle for 3 seconds, then release for 3 seconds. Repeat six times, three times a day.
2. Butterfly flutter – contract strongly for 1 second. Release for 1 second, repeating quickly 20 times.
3. Extended contraction – contract for 10 seconds. Release. Then repeat. Do five repetitions three times a day.

Cranberry

Uses: It may prevent bladder infections.

Dosage: For prevention, drink 3 ounces of cranberry juice daily. As a treatment, drink 12 to 32 ounces a day.

If you use capsules of dried powder, take 1-6 capsules which is equal to 3 ounces of juice. Large amounts of juice (more than 3 – 4 liters a day) often cause diarrhea and other GI symptoms.

Echinacea (use these forms: *E. angustifolia*, and *Echinacea purpurea*)

Uses: It may help prevent or treat infections that recur. Use for 8 weeks and then stop for at least 2 weeks before you restart.

Dosage: Use the dried root 1 – 2gm three times a day.

- Use the freeze-dried plant 325 – 650mg three times a day.
- Use the tincture form (1:5) 3 – 4ml three times a day
- Use the fluid extract (1:1) 1 – 2ml three times a day

Florajen Acidophilus

Uses: It prevents yeast infections.

Dosage: Take 1 capsule daily on an empty stomach with water, juice, or milk. Take a Florajen capsule 1 – 2 hours after taking an antibiotic. One capsule equals 6 cups of fresh yogurt. Keep in fridge at all times. If you travel it is ok to leave at room temp for two weeks. You may also insert capsules into the vagina.

Sexuality Changes

Sexuality includes feelings about ourselves as sexual beings and the way we express those feelings to others. It reflects the whole person emotionally, mentally, and physically. Midlife does not have to mean a decline in sex. It may improve as you become more comfortable with yourself,

have less things to distract you, and if you have a loving partner. If you remain interested in sex, this process will not create a sudden end to your sex appeal.

Tips to Reduce Sexuality Issues

- Talk openly with your partner about sexual feelings.
- Take a hot bath or shower before sex to help your muscles relax.
- Provide time for foreplay.
- Read erotic books or watch films. Engage in regular exercise and rest.
- Use the morning time for sex.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- To help you relax try yoga, massage, meditation, and aromatherapy.
- Reduce or stop using tobacco, alcohol, salt, caffeine, and refined sugar.

Summary

Don't forget, menopause is not a disease, but rather a normal passage which you will likely go through with little or no trouble.

Knowing what to expect, and what to do to stay healthy in future years will help guide you through this time with success. Choose a health care team member who will listen to you and understand your changing health needs.

Helpful Resource

<http://www.menopause.org>

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©7/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5351