



Menopause Treatment: Delay and Disappointment

For centuries, women have been told that menopause is simply the “change of life” – the natural transition from a woman’s childbearing and nonchildbearing years. But as hundreds of millions of women know, menopause is not a simple matter.

The [US Census Bureau](#) reported that approximately 6,000 women a day reach menopause, which translates into more than two million women on a yearly basis. With an average life expectancy of 81, women are spending greater than one-third of their lives in menopause.

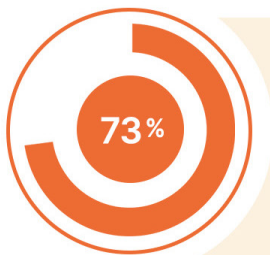
The [Deerfield Institute](#), a division of Deerfield Management Company, recognizes the importance of issues related to menopause and conducted a new research survey to uncover fresh insights about how women view their symptoms, the degree to which they access care and opinions on current treatments.

Background: The Current State

Menopause – defined as the cessation of menstruation for a year – usually occurs between the ages of 40 and 58. This is caused by the gradual decline in the production of estrogen, which is a hormone produced in the ovaries. Estrogen is involved in numerous biological processes but some of the most reported issues with decreasing hormone levels are hot flashes and vaginal health, the consequences of which are often misunderstood or minimized by men.

Hot flashes, which can last for years after menopause, are sudden feelings of heat in part or all of the body. Red blotches may appear and sweating and shivering may follow. [The National Institute of Aging](#) reports that most hot flashes last between 30 seconds and 10 minutes, and can occur several times an hour, a few times a day, or only once or twice a week. After menopause, the vagina may become drier, which can make sexual intercourse uncomfortable or lead women to avoid sex.

Life Interrupted



73% of women surveyed experienced hot flashes

- 5.8 times a day, on average
- Ranged from one time a day (5%) to more than 10 times a day (8%)
- 87% reported their symptoms were moderate or severe
- One in five experienced symptoms in the most severe category



45% of women surveyed experienced vaginal dryness

With 30% saying they were very or extremely bothered by it

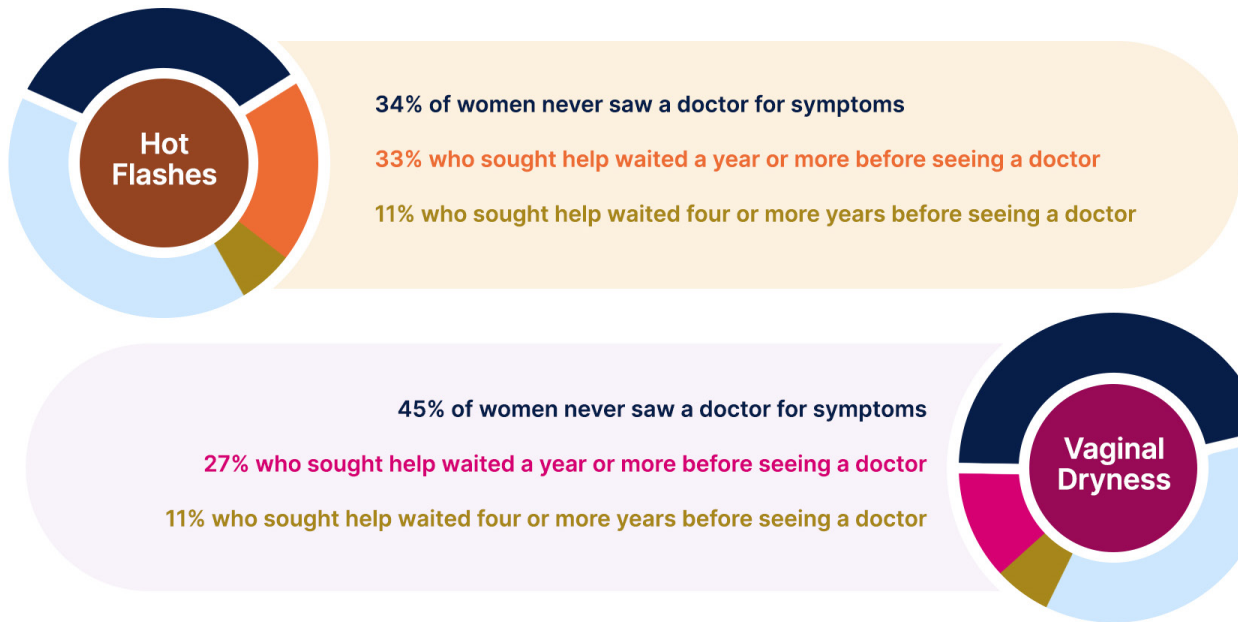
The Deerfield Institute's national survey of 418 menopausal women in the US

The Deerfield Institute's national survey of 418 menopausal women in the US revealed that 73 percent of respondents experienced hot flashes. Women said they experienced hot flashes 5.8 times a day, on average. This ranged from one time a day (5 percent) to more than 10 times a day (8 percent). The vast majority of women (87 percent) reported their symptoms were moderate or severe. One in five experienced symptoms in the most severe category.

For respondents in the severe group, intense discomfort, sleep disturbances and embarrassment were recurring manifestations. In addition, women reported feeling nauseated, being "miserable" and unable "to concentrate at work or at home" as a result of severe hot flashes. One respondent commented that her symptoms were debilitating and kept her "from living a normal life."

Of the women, 45 percent reported vaginal dryness and 30 percent said they were very or extremely bothered by it. Feelings of discomfort, pain, itching and stinging, including more frequent urinary tract infections, were common concerns. But the impact on well being and sexual health were stark. Some women were “embarrassed” and “self-conscious,” and felt “a lack of intimacy” with their partners. One woman reported she is “not excited about sex anymore” with another adding, “sex is a problem.”

Misgivings About Accessing Care



The Deerfield Institute's national survey of 418 menopausal women in the US

The survey showed that many women delayed or avoided seeking medical attention. Approximately one-third (34 percent) of the respondents reported never seeing a doctor for their hot flashes. For those who did seek medical attention, one-third (33 percent) waited a year or more before seeing a doctor, and 11 percent waited four or more years.

Nearly half (45 percent) of the women surveyed never sought care from a physician for their vaginal dryness. For those who did seek a doctor's care, 27 percent waited a year or more with 11 percent delaying their treatment by four or more years.

These results amplify the findings of an earlier study published in the [Journal of Women's Health](#). It found social stigmas around female sexuality remain in Western culture and, as a result, women often avoid and/or are embarrassed to discuss certain menopausal symptoms with their healthcare providers. In addition, many midlife women are unaware or have misconceptions about how to correctly identify, diagnose and treat their symptoms.

The Need for New Options

Hot Flashes

Vaginal Dryness

Not currently treating symptoms



Treating with prescription medication



Extremely satisfied with current treatments



Extremely motivated to find better solutions



The Deerfield Institute's national survey of 418 menopausal women in the US

The majority of women surveyed (81 percent) were not currently treating their hot flashes: 8 percent were taking prescription medication, and 47 percent said they were not very or not all satisfied with currently available treatments. Only 17 percent said they were very or extremely satisfied with treatments for hot flashes and 39 percent said they were very or extremely motivated to find better solutions.

The majority of women who reported symptoms of vaginal dryness (57 percent) said they were not currently treating their symptoms. Approximately one-quarter (24 percent) were very or extremely satisfied with currently available treatments. Only 11 percent were using prescription medication, and 40 percent said they were very or extremely motivated to find better solutions.

The survey points to a combination of issues that may discourage women from seeking treatment for their menopausal symptoms: feeling resigned to the status quo, societal shame, unsatisfactory treatments, and a lack of treatment options. The many women who avoid or delay medical support highlights the imperative for improvement.

And while menopause is a complex healthcare issue, it also carries an economic dimension. H.R.6749, [The Menopause Research and Equity Act of 2023](#), is a \$275 million bipartisan initiative designed to help fill knowledge gaps and to study new treatments. Government interest is being driven by workplace equity issues and the estimated \$1.8 billion in lost wages due to menopause-related symptoms (\$26.6 billion annually when medical expenses are added), as reported in a study by the [Mayo Clinic](#).

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