

# Menopause and Hormone Replacement Therapy

## What is menopause?

Menopause is a normal change in a women's life when her periods stop. This often happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years old. During menopause a woman's body slowly makes less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. A woman has gone through menopause when she has not had a period for 12 months in a row.

## What are the symptoms of menopause?

As you near menopause, you may have:

- Changes in your period—time between periods or amount of flow may change
- Hot flashes—getting warm in the face, neck and chest.
- Night sweats and sleeping problems that lead to feeling tired, stressed or tense
- Vaginal changes—the vagina may become dry and thin, and sex may be painful
- Thinning of your bones may lead to loss of height and bone breaks.

## Who needs treatment for symptoms of menopause?

- For some women, many of these changes will go away over time without any treatment
- Some women will choose treatment for their symptoms. If you choose treatment, estrogen alone or estrogen with progesterone (for a woman with a uterus or womb) can be used.

## What is hormone therapy for menopause?

Hormone therapy for menopause can help with the symptoms. Women are often given estrogen or estrogen with progesterone. Like all medicines, hormone therapy has risk and benefits. Talk to your provider about hormones. **If you decide to use hormones, use them at the lowest dose that helps and for the shortest time that you need them.**

### **What are the risks of using hormones?**

For some women, hormone therapy may increase their chances of getting blood clots, heart attacks, strokes, breast cancer, and gall bladder disease. For a woman with a uterus, estrogen increases her chance of getting cancer of the uterine lining, but adding progesterone lowers this risk.

### **Who should *not* take hormone therapy for menopause?**

- Women who think they are pregnant
- Women who have problems with vaginal bleeding
- Women who have certain kinds of cancer
- Women who have had a stroke or heart attack in the past year
- Women who have had blood clots.

### **Are herbs and other “natural” products useful in treating the symptoms of menopause?**

At this time, we do not know if herbs or other “natural” products are helpful or safe. Studies are being done to learn about the benefits and risks.

### **What can I do to improve my health whether I am using hormones or not?**

- Eat right and watch your weight
- Exercise regularly, at least 5 times per week for 30 minutes
- Don't smoke or chew tobacco
- Take calcium to help protect your bones
- Have your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar checked regularly
- Have a breast exam and breast X-ray (mammogram) every year
- Have a Pap smear and pelvic exam regularly
- Use seat belts whenever in a vehicle
- Get regular immunizations for tetanus, flu, and pneumonia
- If over 50, ask your provider about a test for colon cancer

Adapted from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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