

# Managing Menopause



Menopause is reached when a woman stops having monthly periods for 12 months in a row. It often happens as a natural part of aging. It also can happen if the ovaries are surgically removed, or changed by radiation or chemotherapy. Estrogen is a hormone made by the ovaries. When less estrogen is made, signs of menopause may occur. In the months prior to menopause, there is less estrogen made by the ovaries and body changes occur. These changes will vary among women. Many experience symptoms such as hot flashes or night sweats. Often these improve over time. Talk about your body changes with your health care team. Talk about treatment options that may help you manage your menopause.

## Signs of menopause

Know that even though these signs may be part of menopause, they also may be signs of other health conditions. Let your doctor know about any changes you are having. Common signs for many women include:

- Changes in periods or menstrual cycle
- 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

## Concerns to report to your doctor

If you have any of the following signs, call your doctor's office:

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

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# Managing Menopause *continued*



## What you can do to help yourself

### To help manage hot flashes

Avoid things that trigger hot flashes if possible, such as:

- Strong emotions
- Tight clothing
- Heat
- Caffeine, including coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate
- Alcohol
- Hot, spicy foods like cayenne or cinnamon

### Things you can do to manage hot flashes, include:

- Stay cool
- Sleep in a cool room
- Use fans during the day
- Dress in layers. Remove pieces of clothing at first sign of feeling flush.
- Do deep, slow abdominal breathing to help you relax. Breathe about six to eight breaths each minute. Try this for 15 minutes in the morning and evening.
- Add soy foods into your diet each day like soy milk or tofu
- Talk to your doctor or dietitian about changes to your diet or adding vitamins or herbs. Natural sources of estrogen include uncooked Mexican yams, Ginseng root, Vitamin E, Multivitamin with B and C complex and Zinc.
- Exercise each day for 30 to 60 minutes or more
- Find or create a support group

### To help with sleep

- Try to stay cool at night by keeping the room cool and wearing lightweight clothes
- Do not rely on sleeping pills
- Exercise 30 to 60 minutes each day
- Do not use caffeine or alcohol in the evening
- Try 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 every day, even on weekends
- Avoid late meals and filling snacks

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### To help your moods or anxious feelings

- Use guided imagery or relaxation exercises on tapes, DVDs or CDs
- Use deep, slow abdominal breathing
- Learn to use biofeedback
- Do not rely on tranquilizers
- Join a support group
- Seek counseling or other professional help if needed

### To help with vaginal dryness or sexual problems

- Lubricants and creams may help with vaginal dryness and intercourse if it is painful
- Estrogen creams are useful to reduce soreness, but they should not be used right before sexual intercourse
- Testosterone creams can be used to increase sex drive
- Lubricants will relieve vaginal dryness during intercourse
- Choose cotton underwear
- Kegel exercises may help strengthen the muscles that control the bladder
- More foreplay and stimulation will boost natural lubrication
- Communication with your partner is very important

### To help with dry skin and hair

- Put lotion on dry skin two times each day
- Do not use lotions with heavy perfumes or alcohol. They can cause more dryness.
- Brush your hair more often. This helps spread your hair's natural oils.
- Use hair conditioner or moisturizer each time you wash your hair
- Limit your time in the sun
- Use sunscreen with 30 or 45 SPF often
- Wear a hat or head covering
- Limit use of hair coloring or permanent waves. These chemicals can dry your hair.

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## Drug treatments for menopause

There are some medicines that your doctor can order that may help with signs of menopause. Talk to your doctor about your best options for treatment.

### Hormone replacement therapy:

**Estrogen:** Estrogen is used to treat symptoms of menopause. It may help prevent heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis that weaken bones. Estrogen comes in many pill forms, a patch, creams or lotions, a spray or vaginal ring.

**Progestin:** Progestin can help prevent bone loss or osteoporosis. Taking progestin may cause you to continue or start to have periods. This is normal and helps prevent uterine cancer. Progestin comes in pill form, creams or shot. Your doctor may order progestin if you cannot take estrogen. If you have had your uterus removed, you do not need to take progestin.

**Estrogen and Progestin (combined):** There are medicines that have both estrogen and progestin in them. This is available in pills and a patch.

**Clonidine:** This is a drug used to treat high blood pressure. It also can help ease hot flashes in some women. It should be taken at night because it can cause light headedness. This drug comes in a pill or as a patch.

**Bellergal:** This may help ease hot flashes. It can cause dry mouth, blurred vision and sedation.

**SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors):** Medicines in this group are often used to treat depression or anxiety. In low doses, some of the medicines in this group, such as Effexor, Prozac and Paxil have been helpful in easing hot flashes.

### Other treatments

You may benefit from other treatments to manage signs 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 when used with your other medicines or treatments. Some women find meditation, massage, acupuncture, exercise and other similar treatments can bring relief. These also may help with your overall health and well being.

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## Lower your risk of heart disease and osteoporosis

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

### To help prevent heart disease:

- Do not smoke. Please ask for help if you want to stop.
- Limit alcohol to one drink per day
- Eat a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and whole grains
- Limit salt, cholesterol and fat in your diet
- Control your weight. Extra weight means your heart has to work harder.
- Exercise 30 minutes each day

### To help keep your bones strong and prevent osteoporosis:

- Try boosting calcium and make changes to your diet:
  - > Increase the calcium in your diet or take calcium supplements each day
  - > Eat foods that have more calcium, including:
    - Milk products
    - Many green vegetables
    - Calcium fortified orange juice or other foods
    - Soy milk
  - > Take vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium and grow bone
  - > Cut back on the salt, animal protein and caffeine in your diet
- Walk and do muscle building exercises
- If needed, talk to your doctor about medicines that can help your bone health