

Menopause - Hormone Therapy Facts

MENOPAUSE

What is menopause?

Menopause is a normal change in woman's life when her period stops. That's why some people call menopause "the change of life" or "the change." During menopause her body slowly produces less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. A woman has reached menopause when she has not had a period for 12 months in a row. This often happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years old.

What is hormone therapy for menopause?

Hormone therapy for menopause has also been called hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Hormones are needed for a woman's body to develop and for her to have children. One of these hormones is estrogen. Lower amounts of estrogen in menopause may lead to hot flashes, vaginal dryness and thin bones. To help with these problems, women are often given estrogen or estrogen with progestin (another hormone). Like all medicines, hormone therapy has risks and benefits. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about hormones. *If you decide to use hormones, use them at the lowest dose that helps. Also use them for the shortest time that you need them.*

What are the symptoms of menopause?

Every woman's period will stop at menopause. Some women may not have any other symptoms at all. As your estrogen levels drop, you may have:

- Changes in your period—time between periods or flow may be different.
- Hot flashes ("hot flushes")—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 hurt.
- Thin, weak bones (osteoporosis) may lead to loss of height and bone breaks.

Do I need treatment for symptoms of menopause?

- For many women, most of these changes will go away over time without treatment.
- Some women will still want treatment for their symptoms and to prevent bone loss. If you choose treatment, estrogen alone or estrogen with progestin (for a woman who still has her uterus or womb) can be used.

What are the benefits from using hormones?

- Estrogen provides relief of hot flashes and vaginal dryness.
- Hormones reduce the chances of getting thin, weak bones and hip breaks (osteoporosis)
- Hormones also reduce the risk of colon cancer.

What are the risks of using hormones?

- Hormone therapy may increase your chances of getting breast cancer, heart attacks, strokes, blood clots and gall bladder disease. For a woman with a uterus, estrogen increases her chance of getting endometrial cancer (cancer of the uterine lining). Adding progestin lowers this risk.

How do hormones help with menopause?

- Reduces hot flashes
- Treats vaginal dryness, itching and burning
- Slows bone loss

Who should not take hormone therapy for menopause?

Women who...

- Think they are pregnant
- Have problems with vaginal bleeding
- Have had certain kinds of cancers
- Have had a stroke or heart attack in the past year
- Have had blood clots

Menopause - Hormone Therapy Facts (cont.)

Should hormone therapy be used to protect the heart or prevent strokes?

- Do not use hormone therapy to prevent heart attacks or strokes.

Should hormone therapy be used to prevent memory loss or Alzheimer's disease?

- Do not use hormone therapy to prevent memory loss or Alzheimer's disease.

Do these hormones protect against aging and wrinkles?

- Studies have not shown that hormone therapy works for these concerns.

How long should I use hormones for menopause?

- You should talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Again, hormones should be used at the lowest dose that helps and for the shortest time that you need them.

Does it make a difference what form of hormones I use for menopause?

- The risks and benefits may be the same for all hormone products for menopause, such as pills, patches, vaginal creams, gels and rings.

Are herbs and other "natural" products useful in treating symptoms of menopause?

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

To Learn More...

Department of Health and Human Services
National Women's Health
www.4woman.gov
1-800-994-9662
1-888-220-5446 (for hearing impaired)

Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov/womans
www.fda.gov/cder
1-888-INFO-FDA

National Institutes of Health
www.NIH.gov/PHTindex.htm
www.nccam.nih.gov

Agency for Healthcare Research Quality
www.ahrq.gov/ppip/healthywom.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/health/womensmenu.htm