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Ladies!

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Managing
Menopause

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Women's Health Issue



MENOPAUSE:

What You Need to Know

to Maintain Good Health

Whether your symptoms have just begun with the onset of perimenopause or are just beginning to wane, here are some things you need to consider for your health's sake.

Menopause is a natural change every woman will face at some point in her life—and it's not one to be taken lightly. In addition to the many physical changes you will experience, this landmark life event may increase your risk for diseases such as osteoporosis and atherosclerosis. The first step toward

protecting your health and increasing your comfort and quality of life during menopause is to understand the stages and symptoms.

STAGES AND SYMPTOMS

Menopause, or the period that marks the permanent cessation of menstrual activity, typically occurs between ages 45 and 55, but can occur

as early as 35. During perimenopause, the body begins to produce less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone, causing many of the commonly reported symptoms.

"Perimenopause can begin about 10 years prior to menopause," says Karen Giblin, founder of the Prime Plus/Red Hot Mamas® menopause management education program.

Red Hot Support

Facing menopause or experiencing distressing symptoms? You're not alone. Find support from other women by attending a Red Hot Mamas meeting. Offered through many H2U affiliates at HCA facilities, women across the country are coming together to educate and empower themselves about this significant change in their lives.

"Red Hot Mamas is both educational and supportive," says Karen Giblin, founder of Prime Plus/Red Hot Mamas, which is the nation's largest menopause education program. "Every month, a different topic is covered in a presentation by a healthcare professional and an opportunity is given to ask questions. Attending the sessions improves women's understanding and attitudes about menopause and it's a great bonding experience as well."

"Women may notice occasional hot flashes, sleep disturbances and some mood swings, along with other symptoms."

The symptoms associated with perimenopause include the following:

- changes in menstruation (heavier or lighter periods, irregular cycles)
- hot flashes (sudden rushes of heat that move from your chest to your neck and head)
- difficulty sleeping
- night sweats (hot flashes occurring while sleeping)
- vaginal dryness, which can lead to pain or discomfort during sexual intercourse
- increased susceptibility to vaginal and bladder infections
- decreased libido
- hindered memory and concentration
- mood swings (irritability, depression, etc.)
- weight gain or thickened waistline

Each woman experiences menopause uniquely. Not all of these symptoms will be present in every woman and the intensity of symptoms will vary among individuals.

READILY AVAILABLE RELIEF

Some symptoms will gradually fade with time such as hot flashes, once the body adjusts to the hormonal changes.

"It's extremely important to work with your healthcare provider to educate yourself and create a menopause management plan," says Giblin. "Many women may feel isolated during the menopausal years, but when they open lines of communication with their healthcare providers, they improve their knowledge and sense of well-being."

Treatment options for menopausal symptoms may include lifestyle modifications, prescription medications or alternative/complementary treatments.

Lifestyle Modifications

No matter your symptoms, regular exercise and a healthy, balanced diet can help by increasing your energy, improving your mood, enhancing sleep and managing weight. Studies have also indicated that women who exercise have fewer hot flashes. Aim for at least 30 minutes or more of moderately intense activity (brisk walking, jogging and dancing to name a few) at least three times per week.

Evaluate your daily diet using the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Guide Pyramid, which provides recommendations for servings of fruits, vegetables, protein, carbohydrates and sweets. Consider supplementing your diet with daily vitamins for an added nutrition boost, particularly if you aren't getting the necessary nutrients from food. In addition, aim to consume enough fiber (21 grams daily), drink at least eight glasses of water throughout the day, and consume adequate calcium and vitamin D (to help prevent osteoporosis).

Other lifestyle modifications that prove particularly helpful in managing hot flashes are wearing light layers of clothing so you can adjust as needed, keeping a fan at home or in the office, and avoiding foods and substances that may trigger hot flashes (caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods).

Prescription Medications

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is an effective means of controlling hot flashes, mood swings and vaginal dryness. It's available as estrogen alone (only for women who've had a hysterectomy) or estrogen plus progestin in various forms including pills, patches, topical

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Sex and Menopause: A Surprising Study

With the passage of menopause, a certain proportion of women will complain about declining sexual desire and pleasure. According to a recent study reported in *The Journal of the North American Menopause Society*, female sexual dysfunction (a decrease in sexual desire and fulfillment) stems from multiple factors including hormones, relationship quality, depression, stress and medications.

It's important for women to do their homework. Gather information and develop a comprehensive approach that looks at the potential causes of female sexual dysfunction. Also work with your doctor to reevaluate medications with adverse side effects and talk to a counselor if necessary.

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creams and vaginal rings. However, certain types of HRT may increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, breast cancer, blood clots and gallbladder disease for some women. But some types of HRT could also decrease the risk of colon cancer and hip fractures due to osteoporosis.

"It is important to talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of hormone therapy," says Giblin. "If you're really symptomatic, you shouldn't be fearful of HRT if your healthcare provider recommends it. When taking medication, you must be carefully monitored for efficacy and potential side effects."

Alternative/ Complementary Treatments

Herbal and plant-based supplements such as soy contain phytoestrogens (an estrogen-like product derived from plants) that some women opt to use to help control symptoms. Soy products such

as milk, soy nuts, tofu, and powders and pills are readily available. Other sources of phytoestrogens are the herbs black cohosh, wild yam and valerian root. However, it is important to note that these substances are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and no formal testing for efficacy, safety and long-term use has been performed.

POSSIBLE PERKS

You may find comfort in knowing that some of these options for treating uncomfortable menopausal symptoms help protect you against osteoporosis, heart disease and breast cancer.

Regular exercise promotes heart and vascular health, which, in turn, then staves off the likelihood of blocked arteries and heart attack; helps prevent the development of osteoporosis (a condition characterized by weak, brittle bones) by building bone mass through

weight-bearing activities like jogging, walking and dancing; and reduces your risk for breast cancer. Likewise, eating a healthy diet and maintaining an optimal body weight can help protect against these conditions.

If you do decide to use HRT for symptom management, your bones will reap the benefit of the medication's ability to reduce bone loss. If the prevention of osteoporosis is your only concern, discuss treatment options with your doctor, as other medications are available specifically for that purpose.

"Menopause is a time to gather lots of information, reevaluate your life, and take charge of your health," says Giblin. "It is necessary to develop effective strategies to achieve optimal health. We have an outstanding opportunity to maintain our vitality at menopause, stay well and live long lives."