

# Menopause

## What is Menopause?

Menopause refers to a time in a woman's life when the monthly menstrual period becomes irregular and eventually stops. The ovaries produce less and less of the female hormone ESTROGEN and fewer eggs during this time. For most women, menopause is a gradual process over many years and generally occurs between ages 45 and 55. You have reached menopause when you have not had a period for 12 months in a row.

## Symptoms

Many women experience few or no symptoms. However, decreased estrogen production can produce the following symptoms in some women:

- Hot Flashes- a sudden feeling of warmth throughout the upper body or all over followed by heavy sweating, this feeling may last a few minutes or longer and can occur occasionally or frequently.
- Insomnia or disturbed sleep
- Vaginal dryness
- Mood changes
- Weakened bladder control
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Lower backaches
- Decreased sexual desires

## Long Term Health Risks

Hormonal changes can increase the risk of:

- Osteoporosis or the thinning of bones, increasing the chance of fractures
- Heart disease and stroke  
Increase in total and LDL (bad) cholesterol and a fall in HDL (good) cholesterol which may contribute to increased risk of cardiovascular events.

## Non-hormonal Remedies to Treat or Reduce:

1. Hot Flashes
  - Limit caffeine or alcohol
  - Drink plenty of water
  - Eat foods high in phytoestrogen, such as soybeans, soybean curd, soy milk
  - Keep cool and avoid overheated places
  - Dress lightly and in layers
2. Vaginal dryness
  - Use water-based lubricants such as KY Jelly
3. Osteoporosis
  - Include high calcium foods such as fat free milk or yogurt, soybean curd (firm tofu), dark green leafy vegetables, canned fish with bones
  - Weight bearing exercise such as light weight training, walking, stair-climbing, dancing, aerobics
  - Consider calcium supplements
4. Heart disease and stroke
  - Follow a low saturated fat, low sodium (salt) diet
  - Engage in regular aerobic physical activities such as walking, jogging, swimming, dancing
  - Stop smoking

You should check with your doctor as to what may be appropriate remedies for you.

## Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

HRT will relieve menopausal symptoms in most women. HRT comes in a variety of forms: pill, patch, cream, or intra-uterine devices (IUDs). The following options are

available for women who choose to take hormone treatment for menopause:

1. Estrogen Replacement Therapy
2. Progesterone Replacement Therapy
3. Estrogen - progesterone Combination Therapy

Women who have not had hysterectomies (surgical removal of the uterus) are usually given the estrogen-progesterone combination therapy to protect against endometrial (uterine) cancer.

HRT can cause bleeding similar to menstruation. Other side effects include weight gain, water retention, breast tenderness, blood clots, headaches and nausea. Long term users of estrogen - progesterone combination therapy are also at a greater risk for stroke, breast cancer, and heart disease. Be sure to discuss the benefits and risks of HRT with your doctor or gynecologist before making a decision since HRT may not be suitable for every woman.

Menopause does not have to be a negative experience. By remaining physically active, getting regular health check-ups, and understanding the physical changes that you are going through, you can have a happy and healthy menopause.

華人社區健康資源中心

Chinese  
Community  
Health  
Resource  
Center