Managing Symptoms of Menopause

Menopause is the time in a woman’s life when menstrual periods permanently stop. It happens as a natural part of aging or when less estrogen is being made by the ovaries. Changes in estrogen may be caused by treatments such as surgery, radiation therapy or chemotherapy.

Here is information about the common changes that may happen during menopause and ways to help manage the symptoms.

Hot Flashes

Hot flashes are caused by a change in hormone levels during peri-menopause. Hot flashes often begin as a sensation in the head, neck and upper chest, spreading to the entire body. Most women feel warmth and sweating, sometimes followed by a cold chill.

Things that may help:

- Wear absorbent, cotton clothing and dress in layers.
- Keep room temperature at a lower setting.
- Use cooler water when taking a bath/shower.
- Keep air moving with room fans or personal hand fan.
- Reduce how much caffeine you take.
- Reduce how much alcohol you use, especially red and white wines.
- Avoid foods hot and spicy foods.
- Try to exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- Do not smoke.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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• Reduce your stress. You may find it helpful to use relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation.

• Talk with your doctor before using any medicines, herbal remedies and dietary supplements for your menopausal symptoms.

Irregular Menstrual Cycles
Your periods might be shorter or longer than usual. You may have changes in the amount of bleeding or clotting.

Things that may help:
• Keep track of your menstrual cycles (the date when they start and how long they last). Write down any symptoms that you are having. Take this information with you to your doctor’s appointment.

• Talk with your doctor about using birth control while you are going through menopause.

Vaginal Dryness and Urinary Tract Changes
Vaginal dryness, pain during sex, yeast infections, itching, problems controlling your urine and urinary tract infections are often part of menopause. It is important to talk about these problems with your doctor.

Things that may help:
• Use water-based lubricants such as KY Extended®, Replens®, or Astroglide® before, during and after intercourse. Do not use petroleum jelly like Vaseline®.

• Talk with your doctor about using an estrogen product that you apply to the vaginal area if the water-based lubricants alone do not help.

• When you have sex, increase the foreplay time. This helps boost natural lubrication.

• Do not use douches, feminine hygiene sprays and perfumed soaps.

• Wear loose, cotton underwear.

• Urinate after sexual intercourse.

• Drink at least 8 cups (8 ounces each) of water daily.
Skin & Hair Dryness
During menopause, your skin and hair may become dry.

Things that may help:

- Apply moisturizing lotion to your skin at least 2 times a day.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher and put it on your skin often. Wear a hat or head covering.
- Brushing your hair more often may increase the amount of natural oil in your hair.
- Use hair conditioner on regular basis.
- Limit chemical exposure to your hair, including perms, coloring or straightening products.

Mood and Emotional Changes
You may have changes in your feelings and moods. These changes may include depression, irritability or problems with concentration. Menopause may also affect your sleep.

Things that may help:

- Talk with your doctor about the changes in your feelings and moods. There may be medicines to help you with these changes.
- Stay involved with healthy activities that you enjoy.
- Make healthy food choices.
- Exercise regularly.
- Try to reduce stress in your life.
- Focus a few tasks at a time. Set realistic goals.
- Take care of your emotional health. You may find it helpful to talk to a counselor.

Osteoporosis
Osteoporosis makes your bones weak and more likely to break. Anyone can develop osteoporosis, but it is common in older women.
Things that may help:

- Have a bone density scan done to check your bones. This gives a baseline measurement.
- Do weight-bearing exercises, such as brisk walking, hiking, yoga, dancing, golf, tennis, tai chi, or strength training.
- Talk to your doctor about taking Calcium with Vitamin D.
- Do not smoke.

Complementary & Alternative Therapies

Therapies such as meditation, massage, acupuncture and exercise may help with the changes you have during menopause. You may also want to talk with your doctor about the use of herbs of dietary supplements.