



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

Coping with the symptoms of menopause

Not all women experience menopause in the same way. For some, menopause can bring on an array of uncomfortable symptoms. Other women may experience few discomforts. This educational information has been prepared to help you manage the most common issues relating to menopause.

Relieving hot flashes

- Identify and avoid your hot flash “triggers.” Common triggers include stress, heat, caffeine, alcohol, tight clothing, and cigarette smoke. Do not smoke.
- Keep the bedroom cool. Use fans during the day. Wear light layers of clothes with natural fibers.
- Try deep, slow abdominal breathing (6 to 8 breaths per minute). Practice deep breathing for 15 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes in the evening, and at the onset of hot flashes.
- Exercise daily. Walking, swimming, dancing, and bicycling are good choices, along with yoga.
- Consider taking vitamin E supplements (natural *d*-alpha-tocopherol 400–800 IU) after reviewing with your physician.
- Add soy protein in the form of foodstuffs to your diet daily in place of animal protein. Promensil and isoflavone tablets have

NOT been shown to significantly help menopausal symptoms, and soy pills/powders/shakes are not specifically recommended.

- Black cohosh (in the form of Remifemin) can be used for hot flashes. The German Commission E, which is similar to the US Food and Drug Association (FDA), has approved it for 6 months of use. Avoid kava kava. Remember that the FDA has not approved the use of any herbal products for menopause.
- Some antidepressants and anticonvulsants may help block hot flashes. Examples are Effexor (venlafaxine), Paxil (paroxetine), Prozac (fluoxetine), Zoloft (sertraline), and Neurontin (gabapentin). These agents have risks and benefits like any other prescription medicine.

Note: Hormone therapy remains the most effective treatment for moderate to severe menopausal symptoms.



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For patient information on hundreds of health topics, see the Patient Education and Health Information web site, www.clevelandclinic.org/health

Relieving insomnia

- Keep the bedroom cool to prevent night sweats.
- Avoid regular use of sleeping pills.
- Exercise daily but not right before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol at night.
- Take a warm bath or shower at bedtime.
- Eat cereal and milk products at bedtime or during the night. (Avoid products that contain caffeine.)
- Wear socks to bed to help with deep sleep.

Coping with mood swings, fears, and depression

- Find a self-calming skill to practice, such as yoga, meditation, or slow, deep breathing.
- Avoid tranquilizers, if possible. However, prescription antidepressants can be very effective.
- Engage in a creative outlet that fosters a sense of achievement.
- Stay connected with your family and community. Nurture your friendships.

Relieving painful intercourse

- Try using a vaginal water-based moisturizing lotion, like Replens or SILK-E, or use a lubricant during intercourse, like K-Y jelly, Lubrin, or Astroglide.
- Consider local estrogen treatments for the vagina and bladder, eg, the Estring vaginal ring.

Preventing osteoporosis

- Calcium can slow bone loss and may decrease fractures. Consume 1,500 mg of calcium a day. Good sources of calcium are calcium supplements (like Tums or Citracal), fruit juices, and breads; low fat dairy products; green leafy

vegetables (like broccoli, kale, and spinach greens), and almonds; and soy milk.

- Consume 400–800 IU a day of vitamin D. It not only aids in the absorption of calcium, but is also very important in metabolism.
- Eat foods low in sodium, low in animal protein, and low in caffeine.
- Bone mass is built before menopause as a result of exercising, diet, and genetics. Exercises that increase bone mass make the muscles work against gravity. Walking and muscle-building exercises may reduce bone loss and fractures and improve balance. The National Osteoporosis Foundation Web site is a good source of information (www.nof.org).

Preventing heart disease

- Eat a variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, including soy foods. Limit salt (sodium), cholesterol, and fat (especially animal fat and *trans*-fatty acids).
- Get at least 30 to 60 minutes of moderate exercise over the course of each day. You don't have to do it all at once. Activities that increase the heart rate include gardening, walking, dancing, and aerobics.
- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Follow your physician's instructions for controlling high blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Consider consuming 25 grams of soy protein per day in place of animal protein. This may help lower your cholesterol.
- Consider taking one low-strength (81-mg) aspirin daily, if your physician approves.

Good sources of information can be found on the Web at www.menopause.org and www.clevelandclinic.org/womenshealth.