



Menopause & Hormones

Common Questions

What is menopause?

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

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 you near menopause, 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, or chest, with and without sweating.
- Night sweats that may lead to problems sleeping and feeling tired, stressed, or tense.
- Vaginal changes—the vagina may become dry and thin, and sex may be painful.
- Thinning of your bones, which may lead to loss of height and bone breaks (osteoporosis).

Who needs treatment for symptoms of menopause?

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

What is hormone therapy for menopause?

Lower hormone levels in menopause may lead to hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and thin bones. To help with these problems, women may be prescribed estrogen or estrogen with progestin (another hormone). Like all medicines, hormone therapy has benefits and risks. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about hormone therapy. If you decide to use hormone therapy, use it at the lowest dose that helps. Also use hormones for the shortest time that you need them.

Who should not take hormone therapy for menopause?

Women who:

- Think they are pregnant.
- Have problems with vaginal bleeding.
- Have certain kinds of cancers.
- Have had a stroke or heart attack.
- Have had blood clots.
- Have liver disease.

What are the benefits of using hormone therapy for menopause?

- Hormone therapy may help relieve hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, or dyspareunia (pain with sexual activity).
- Hormones may reduce your chances of getting thin, weak bones (osteoporosis), which break easily.

What are the risks of using hormone therapy?

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

