

## Menopause Basics

### I. Intro to Midlife-Definitions:

1. Menopause-the permanent cessation of menses (periods) because of loss of ovarian function, and is determined after 12 consecutive months of no periods (amenorrhea).
2. Early and Late Menopause- menopause is considered **early** if the final menstrual period occurs before age 45 and **late** if it occurs after age 54.
3. Perimenopause- begins with the onset of intermenstrual cycle irregularities (+/-7d) or other menopause-related symptoms and extends to include the 12 months after your final menstrual period. These tend to be the most symptomatic years.

What are hormones?

- Chemical messengers that coordinate different functions in your body by carrying messages through your blood to your organs, skin, muscles, and other tissues.
- Hormones are part of the endocrine system, and include the tissues (mostly glands) that make the hormones. Minor changes in hormone levels can cause significant changes to the body and its processes.
- Estrogen is made in the ovaries, adrenal glands and placenta.
- Progesterone is made in the corpus luteum and placenta.
- Testosterone is made in the ovaries, adrenal glands, and fat tissue (in females).

In the perimenopausal stage, testosterone and progesterone start to decline fairly steadily and estrogen is very erratic but generally declining as well.

This is when symptoms appear and can be very disruptive. Vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes and night sweats), irregular periods, weight gain, mood swings, vaginal dryness, sleep problems, low sex drive, muscle and joint pain, dry skin are just a few.

### II. Short Term Health Impacts:

- Changes in how you feel on a daily basis with energy, mood, concentration
- Weight/body composition changes despite doing nothing different
- Sleep changes with night time waking
- Metabolic shifts, rising cholesterol and blood pressure
- Genitourinary changes with dryness, painful intercourse, frequent urination, UTIs
- General muscle and joint pains that may limit exercise and quality of life
- Skin changes

### Long Term Health Impacts:

- Cardiovascular disease remains the #1 cause of death for women. Estrogen is important for regulating blood pressure and cholesterol.
- Osteoporosis-estrogen decline accelerates the loss of bone density.
- Musculoskeletal syndrome of menopause-new term!
- Genitourinary syndrome of menopause-changes in the vaginal and vulvar tissue that can lead to discomfort and urinary tract infections.

### III. What you can DO:

Track your symptoms, track your cycles, and see an expert!

1. **Sleep**-prioritize it. Shoot for 7-9 hours per night. It helps correct other downstream problems.
2. **Exercise**-the best one is the one you will *do*. Resistance training is key for building strength and bone density. Cardio is important for your overall health. Mix it up!
3. **Stress management**-unique to each person. Take time for yourself...a walk, a nap, read a book, garden, talk to a therapist, talk to your friends. Lean on your community!
4. **Nutrition**-Protein, fiber, carbohydrates are all important. Getting ENOUGH calories to fuel yourself is mandatory. Make sure to hydrate!
5. **Pharmacology**- hormone therapy, non-hormone medications. They are safe and effective for symptom relief and preventative care.

#### **Hormone Therapy:**

Who can use it?

Most women can use hormone therapy. It has been well studied and is very safe.

**Estrogen:** FDA approved medication identical to the chemical messenger that your body naturally makes.

-Patch, pill, gel, cream, spray, vaginal ring. Doses are individualized to ensure symptoms improve and side effects are minimal.

**Progesterone:** capsule that is taken at bedtime, combination patch, or IUD.

-All women with a uterus that are taking estrogen must use progesterone as well to protect against endometrial cancer.

**Testosterone:** there is no FDA approved female product at this time.

-Labs need to be checked prior to starting and periodically after to ensure correct dosing.

-Gel, cream, pellet

If you are one of those who are not appropriate for hormone therapy, there are non-hormonal alternatives that will help manage symptoms.

The menopause transition is a big physiologic shift that is going to happen to all women who live long enough.

It is possible to feel good and look good now, as well as reduce your risk for future health problems.

At Monarch Women's Health I provide a personalized medicine approach to each patient to develop a treatment plan to help you feel your best now and in the future.

Natasha Allison, MD

[drnallison@monarchwomenshealth.org](mailto:drnallison@monarchwomenshealth.org)

[monarchwomenshealth.org](http://monarchwomenshealth.org)