Women’s health

SAFER ALTERNATIVES TO HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY

WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?
Your personal health needs change as you experience different stages in life. Menopause, or the point when you no longer have a menstrual period, can bring with it unique health challenges. It’s a naturally occurring process that results from your body producing less estrogen and progesterone as you grow older.1,2

THESE ARE THINGS WOMEN MAY EXPERIENCE DUE TO MENOPAUSE
Before, during and after menopause, you may experience hot flashes, vaginal dryness or osteoporosis. Some women are prescribed hormone replacement therapy to help with these symptoms. However, hormone replacement therapy can cause serious side effects in some women, including breast or endometrial cancer, blood clots or stroke. For additional information regarding serious side effects or risks, please speak with your doctor.1,2

The good news is there are safe alternatives to hormone replacement therapy. Read on to find out more about what causes hot flashes, vaginal dryness and osteoporosis as well as safe treatment options for each.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF HOT FLASHES?

What causes hot flashes?

Hot flashes are common during menopause. During menopause, your body begins to produce less estrogen and progesterone. These hormones are responsible for maintaining a healthy body temperature. As estrogen and progesterone levels decrease, your body has a harder time controlling your body temperature, which can lead to hot flashes.

How do you experience a hot flash?

Hot flashes typically come on suddenly and can last from a few seconds to a few minutes. They can occur up to several times per day and usually occur at night. You may feel hot all over, sweating profusely, and have a rapid heart rate. In some cases, you may feel cold and shiver, which can happen before or after a hot flash.

How can you manage hot flashes?

There are several strategies you can use to manage hot flashes. For example, you can wear light, loose clothing to help you stay cool. You can also try to avoid hot foods and drinks, as well as spicy foods, alcohol and caffeine, which can make hot flashes worse.

HOW CAN I MANAGE MY VAGINAL DRYNESS?

Vaginal dryness is a common symptom of menopause. As estrogen levels decrease, the moisture in your vaginal tissues decreases, which can lead to dryness, discomfort and pain during sex. Vaginal dryness can also lead to difficulty in achieving and maintaining an erection.

What causes vaginal dryness?

Vaginal dryness is often caused by menopause, but it can also be caused by other factors, such as inadequate lubrication, certain medications or medical conditions, and radiation or chemotherapy.

How do you experience vaginal dryness?

Vaginal dryness is typically characterized by a feeling of dryness or discomfort in the vagina. You may also experience pain or discomfort during sex, or difficulty in achieving or maintaining an erection.

How can you manage vaginal dryness?

There are several strategies you can use to manage vaginal dryness. For example, you can use a water-based lubricant, which can help to lubricate the vagina and reduce discomfort during sex. You can also try to use a topical estrogen cream, which can help to restore estrogen levels and reduce symptoms of vaginal dryness.

HOW CAN I MANAGE MY OSTEOPOROSIS?

What causes osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a bone disease that causes bones to become weak and brittle. It is caused by a combination of factors, including genetics, age, gender, lifestyle, and health. Women are at a higher risk for osteoporosis than men, as they tend to have lower bone density than men. As you age, your bones become weaker and more susceptible to fractures.

How do you experience osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is typically characterized by a loss of bone density and an increased risk of fractures. In severe cases, osteoporosis can lead to bone fractures that can be life-threatening. These fractures can occur in the spine, hip, or wrist.

How can you manage osteoporosis?

There are several strategies you can use to manage osteoporosis. For example, you can eat a healthy diet rich in calcium and vitamin D, which are necessary for building strong bones. You can also try to get regular exercise, which can help to build bone density and reduce the risk of fractures.

Sources


*If your doctor prescribes steroid therapy, consider using a bisphosphonate such as alendronate or ibandronate, which are considered less risky.

+ Dosing adjustment: citalopram (Celexa) maximum daily dose for those older than 60 years: 20 mg/day.
WHAT IS OSTEOPOROSIS?2,4
Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens your bones. All postmenopausal women ages 50 and older should ask their doctors about their risk for osteoporosis. In general, the more risk factors that are present, the greater the risk of fracture.

There are many ways you can reduce the effects of hot flashes without using hormone replacement therapy, including:2

- Avoiding caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and spicy foods
- Trying relaxation methods, such as:
  - Paced breathing
  - Picturing a person, place or time that makes you feel happy and relaxed
- Lowering the thermostat
- Dressing in layers

The following medicines, which are less risky than hormone replacement therapy, can also help reduce the effect of hot flashes:2

- Citalopram (Celexa®)3+
- Venlafaxine (Effexor®)
- Sertraline (Zoloft®)

Common signs of vaginal dryness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaginal irritation</th>
<th>Vaginal itching</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pain with intercourse</td>
<td>Vaginal soreness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urinary frequency</td>
<td>Urinary tract infections</td>
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</tbody>
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Certain lower-risk medicines can help reduce the impact of vaginal dryness, including:2

- Water-soluble lubricants for intercourse
- Long-acting moisturizers such as Replens®
- Hormone replacement estrogen creams, like estradiol and Premarin®, which are less risky because your body doesn’t absorb them as much as it does oral medicines

What types of hormone replacement therapy are risky?2
All oral and patch forms of estrogen are considered potentially risky:

- Estriol (Menest®)
- Estropipate (Ogen®)
- Estradiol (Estrace®)
- Drospirenone-estradiol (Angeliq®)
- Norethindrone/ethinyl estradiol (Femhrt®, Jinteli®)
- Excessive doses of thyroid replacement medicines
- Proton pump inhibitors such as omeprazole (Prilosec®)

What should I consider before stopping hormone replacement therapy?2
After discussing the risks of hormone replacement therapy, your doctor may consider modifying your therapy with safer alternative medicines or by using non-medical methods listed in this brochure. If you and your provider decide that your hormone therapy should be discontinued, you will likely decrease the dose of your hormone replacement therapy over time.

Is my medicine putting me at risk for hot flashes, vaginal dryness or osteoporosis?2
Certain medicines can put you at risk for developing these issues or may even be the underlying cause.

- Leuprolide (Lupron®)
- Danazol (Danocrine®)
- Cough, cold and allergy medicines may contain an antihistamine which can lead to vaginal dryness.
- Many medicines can cause bone thinning, which may lead to osteoporosis, including:
  - Corticosteroids
  - Carbamazepine (Tegretol®)
  - Phenytoin (Dilantin®)
- Excessive doses of thyroid replacement medicines
- Proton pump inhibitors such as omeprazole (Prilosec®)