

# NHS

Lothian

## MENOPAUSE

### *Lifestyle tips, self-help measures and natural alternatives to HRT*

Hot Flashes:	<p>Avoid - heat e.g. very hot baths and showers, spicy food - alcohol, caffeine, smoking.</p> <p>Wear layers of clothing that can be removed easily as soon as a flush starts. Hand-held fans can help. Moist wipes may be useful.</p>
Night Sweats:	<p>Avoid synthetic night clothes and bedclothes. Avoid heavy bedclothes. Sleep on a big towel to absorb sweats.</p>
Anxiety / Palpitations:	<p>Deep, slow breathing; yoga; suitable exercise; reduction in caffeine intake can help.</p>
Exercise:	<p>Regular vigorous exercise will help reduce the frequency and intensity of hot flushes and sweats (e.g. 4 x 30 minute sessions per week). Choose a form of exercise that you enjoy and will continue with in the long term. Exercise helps control weight gain. It also lifts mood and helps prevent heart disease and osteoporosis.</p>
Alcohol:	<p>Watch your intake. More than 2 units daily may double the risk of breast cancer. Alcohol can damage bones.</p>
Weight:	<p>Obesity, i.e. BMI (body mass index) of 35 and over, may treble the risk of breast cancer.</p>
Smoking:	<p><b>Stop.</b> It greatly increases the risk of heart disease and it interferes with absorption of calcium from the gut.</p>
Aromatherapy:	<p>Essential oils of lavender and chamomile are calming and lavender is good for insomnia. Essential oil of rose is uplifting and good for countering low mood and insomnia.</p> <p>Homeopathy, acupuncture, reflexology and massage can help relax muscles and relieve stress. Yoga and Pilates can be beneficial for some women by producing a calming effect.</p>
Diet:	<p>Phyto (plant) oestrogens e.g. soya products, beans, lentils, cereals, Borden bread and linseeds can supplement falling levels of oestrogen. Linseeds also provide the essential fatty acids omega 3 and omega 6. Plant oestrogens can be bought in tablet form. Oily fish should be eaten twice weekly to increase levels of omega 3. Up to 1000 grams of calcium should be consumed daily, preferably from food e.g. milk, yogurt and cheese, to help prevent osteoporosis. A variety of fruits and vegetables and whole grains should also be eaten. Avoid fizzy drinks.</p>

## **Herbal Remedies:**

- Black Cohosh (cimicifuga racemosa)      Probably the best agent to try for hot flushes.
- Dong Quai (angelica sinensis)      May be helpful in relieving vaginal dryness.
- Oil of Evening Primrose      May help breast tenderness.
- Sage (salvia officinales)      Is a drying herb and can reduce the tendency to sweat. May worsen vaginal dryness.
- St John's Wort (hypericum)      Can help anxiety and lift depression. To be effective, tablets need to contain 900 micrograms (mcg) of the active ingredient, hypericin.
- Vitex Agnus Castus (Monks' Pepper)      Can help mood and regulate hormone levels

*Be aware that many herbal or plant extracts, have weak oestrogen-like activity and should be avoided by women undergoing breast cancer treatment.*

*These plant oestrogens are often referred to as phyto-oestrogens or isoflavones.*

## **Useful Addresses**

1. Menopause Matters Ltd      [www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)  
01387 241 121
2. National Osteoporosis Society      Cameron, Bath, BA2 OPS  
[www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk)  
Helpline 0845 4500 230
3. Women's Health Concern      10 Storey's Gate  
Westminster, London, SW1  
Nurse Counselling Service  
0845 123 2319
4. The Daisy Network      [www.daisynetwork.org.uk](http://www.daisynetwork.org.uk)  
(Premature Menopause Support  
Group)      E-M ail: [membership&media@daisynetwork.org.uk](mailto:membership&media@daisynetwork.org.uk)

## **EDINBURGH MENOPAUSE CLINIC**

### **Medical Alternatives to HRT for hot flushes and sweats**

Some women cannot or do not wish to take HRT. The drugs described below are alternatives to HRT. None of these drugs is officially licensed to be used for this reason but we know they can be effective and help a woman to cope with her menopausal symptoms. These drugs must be prescribed by a doctor who will usually suggest that you try one of them for three months initially. If the drug has had no effect in that time then it should be stopped. If it is helping menopausal symptoms, we suggest that you continue it for 6 - 9 months then try to wean it down gradually. If your symptoms return thereafter then you may need to restart it again.

#### **Hormonal therapy**

- **Provera**  
Dose 10mg twice a day
- **Norethisterone**  
Dose: 5mg twice a day

These are synthetic forms of progesterone which can reduce hot flushes and night sweats by around 40%. Although there are no long term studies on using this drug, there is some evidence to suggest that they may be safer for the breasts than standard HRT and less likely to cause problems with thrombosis/clotting.

Side effects are usually mild but might include bloating / fluid retention, weight gain and occasional bleeding. They would not be prescribed to menopausal women who have severe liver impairment or significant arterial disease.

#### **Antidepressant Drugs**

Although these drugs are generally used for treatment of depression, they can also reduce hot flushes and night sweats by around 40%. They also improve mood and sleep pattern.

- **Fluoxetine (Prozac)**  
Dose: 20mg daily

Side effects include nausea, headaches, dizziness and disturbed sleep. It should not be prescribed to women taking St John's Wort.

- **Venlafaxine (Efexor)**  
Dose: 37.5mg twice per day

This can be started with one tablet per day and increased gradually. Side effects include nausea, headaches, constipation and disturbed sleep. It should not be prescribed if there is a history of heart disease, untreated high blood pressure or epilepsy.

*Remember, lifestyle changes can be very helpful too. Taking plenty of exercise combined with a healthy diet will improve wellbeing. Cut down on alcohol and caffeine which can both worsen flushes and sweats. Keep your weight under control. Menopausal symptoms will gradually settle with time and it is important to keep a positive attitude.*



**NHS**

**Lothian**

## **Edinburgh Menopause Clinic**

### **Vaginal and bladder symptoms after the Menopause**

Almost all women notice changes after the menopause in the vaginal and bladder tissues. The symptoms they often experience include:

- vaginal dryness, soreness or irritation
- vaginal discomfort during intercourse
- urinary urgency (needing to empty the bladder urgently, even if is not full)
- urinary frequency
- nocturia (getting up frequently during the night to pass urine)

These symptoms, although rarely connected to any serious conditions, are often very distressing. Many women may feel uncomfortable about discussing these symptoms with anyone, or consider them to be a normal acceptable part of the process of menopause; these problems are however often very easily treated.

In the majority of cases these symptoms are due to a fall in the levels of the hormone **estrogen** which occurs in all women when their periods stop; the hormone estrogen is responsible for maintaining the health of vaginal and bladder tissues, and the lack of estrogen leads to a thinning of the wall of the bladder and the skin of the vagina, leading to dryness, discomfort and urinary symptoms.

### **Treatment**

The most effective treatment for these problems is to replace the estrogen which is lacking; this is done with either **local estrogen replacement or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**.

#### **Local estrogen replacement:**

Estrogen can be given very effectively by the vaginal route in the form of tiny vaginal tablets (Vagifem®), a cream or a soft plastic ring (Estring®) which sits inside the vagina and is changed at three monthly intervals. This method of delivery of estrogen to the tissues is very safe as only a tiny amount of the hormone is absorbed into the bloodstream. Studies have suggested that this route has no significant increased risk of breast cancer, stroke or blood clots. Estrogen given in this way can be continued indefinitely, as long as symptoms are a problem.

### **☐ Systemic HRT:**

If you are experiencing other unwanted menopausal effects such as hot flushes or sweats, you may benefit from traditional HRT which has a systemic (whole body) effect as well as helping vaginal symptoms. This can be prescribed by your GP although not all women can, or choose, to take it. HRT has some small risks - it very slightly increases your risk of breast cancer, stroke and blood clots in the legs or lung. Other side effects include breast tenderness, fluid retention and period-type bleeding.

### **☐ Non-hormonal treatments:**

If you wish to avoid hormones, or for any reason are unable to use them, there are other ways to improve the vaginal symptoms which occur after the menopause. These include general measures such as avoiding contact between the vaginal skin and soap, wipes, perfumes, talc and man-made fibres. Vaginal lubricants such as Replens or Sensilube® can be very helpful and are not limited to use during intercourse. Emollient lotions such as Dermol 500® may be helpful for washing and moisturising vaginal skin. These preparations are available to buy from a chemist, from your GP or from a family planning clinic

## **How to get help**

If you are experiencing any of the problems mentioned, speak to your GP or local well-woman/family planning doctor or nurse who is likely to be able to help. Before any treatment is started however, your doctor is likely to examine you and check for any other skin conditions which may be causing these symptoms, although these are generally much rarer. Similarly, if you receive estrogen replacement treatment and it does not help your symptoms, there may be another cause and your doctor may wish to investigate this further.

