

Menopause Fact Sheet

Night sweats, hot flushes, mood swings, fatigue, irregular periods, difficulty sleeping, memory lapses and joint pain... You may be experiencing symptoms of perimenopause or menopause. If so, you're not alone, and if you work, you represent 17% of the Australian workforce. (1)

Almost all women in menopause experience symptoms ranging from moderate to severe and these symptoms usually hit when women are at the peak in their careers and working lives. Support and understanding is crucial to help women minimize the impact of symptoms and the starting point is increasing awareness amongst everyone of menopause and its impact.

WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

The average age of menopause for Australian women is 51 years and it is diagnosed when a woman has not had a menstrual period for 12 months. This is when women stop producing estrogen (the main sex hormone in women). Estrogen levels will fluctuate prior to menopause and this time is referred to as perimenopause. Symptoms can be experienced both before and after menopause, lasting between 5 and 10 years. Menopause can also occur after surgery to remove ovaries and/or uterus, chemotherapy and radiotherapy to your pelvis.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Women going through perimenopause are at greater risk of symptoms of depression and anxiety even when there is no prior history of mental health conditions. This can impact a woman's ability to function both at home and at work.

LIFESTYLE FACTORS THAT HELP MANAGE SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of menopause can overlap with symptoms caused by life circumstances, including stress and lifestyle factors such as lack of sleep and exercise. Differentiating between symptoms caused by menopause and other life factors can be challenging and therefore it is recommended that you seek

medical advice from a doctor who is trained to assess and treat menopause. A holistic approach to your wellbeing can help unpack all factors to understand what treatments might have the greatest impact. Exercise, including yoga, may reduce the immediate symptoms of menopause. It is unproven whether lifestyle interventions and other alternative therapies directly support menopause. Regardless, weight management, relaxation exercises, cognitive behaviour therapy and controlling environmental temperature are considered to be beneficial.

A health professional can assist in providing an individualized assessment that may include lifestyle changes, psychological support and medications. Regaining a sense of control over your symptom management can support improved mental health.

OTHER TREATMENT OPTIONS

MHT (Menopausal Hormone Therapy, or HRT) includes a range of hormonal treatments that can reduce menopausal symptoms. For the majority of symptomatic women, the benefits of MHT outweigh the risks. Early studies that reported increases in risk of stroke and breast cancer associated with MHT have since been reevaluated and revised with further studies indicating no increased risk with certain treatments prescribed. (2)

It is important to seek support from a doctor who is informed and experienced in menopause treatments and interventions and who can design an individualized plan that considers each woman's specific risks and protective factors.



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COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE OPTIONS

Whilst some complementary medicines may help with mild symptoms, there is little available evidence confirming the efficacy of complementary medicines with symptom management. Vitamin E was the only complementary supplement that was recommended, with some evidence that it works and is safe for most women. (3).

The strongest recommendation is for women to seek advice from informed and experienced health practitioners to determine the right treatment based on their unique and specific needs and circumstances. Visit <https://www.menopause.org.au/> for a list of AMS members who have a special interest in women's health in menopause for further advice.

RESOURCES

Diversity Council Australia; Older Women Matter; May 23, 2013

<https://www.menopause.org.au/health-info/factsheets/what-is-menopausal-hormone-therapymht-and-is-it-safe>

North American Menopause Society (Nonhormonal management of menopause-associated vasomotor symptoms: 2015 position statement of The North American Menopause Society).

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