

Menopause & Beyond

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Menopause is defined as one year without menstrual periods. The years just before this time are referred to as perimenopause. The experience of menopause will be, for each of us, slightly different. Each of us needs to find out as much as we can about this time in our lives, because with knowledge comes power. We need to view this change in our lives as a transition to a new and exciting period of opportunity. Our medical needs will change; our diet and exercise needs will change; and often, our interest and concerns will change.

As always, the physicians of Women's Health Associates will assist you in every way possible to make this change a positive one of you!

Frequently Asked Questions

How will I know when I am going through menopause? There are a number of symptoms of menopause, including menstrual changes, hot flashes, insomnia, night sweats and mood swings. These may last for a few years before your period stops altogether.

What happens during a hot flash? A hot flash is a true measurable increase in your body's temperature. Without estrogen, the internal "thermostat" continues to call for more heat. You can experience something very similar to simple "blushing", all the way to non-stop sweating of your entire body. It is important to recognize that you can decrease the intensity of some of these symptoms by avoiding hot beverages, spicy foods, simple carbohydrates, and smoking. Also, wear loose, light-weight all cotton clothing. A cool bath prior to bed may also help.

Will I need to take estrogen? The need to take hormone replacement therapy or HRT is a very individual decision made by you and your physician. HRT can relieve the common symptoms of menopause as well as reduce the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. There may, however, be medical reasons for you not to take it and your doctor can review with you the alternative treatments.

What about additional soy in my diet? To date, there is no conclusive data on the effects of soy on breast cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis. Most experts recommend a limited amount of animal products and a diet high in fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains. Soy can be a part of this healthy lifestyle.

Is there any medicine I can take during the perimenopause? Many women are now taking low dose birth control pills to help reduce the symptoms of perimenopause. Menses return to 28 days, hot flashes decrease, and moods seem to level out.

Will I need birth control? You will need birth control during perimenopause but not after menopause.

What about osteoporosis? Since there are no early symptoms of this disease, your doctor will evaluate your risk factors and may recommend a bone density test. Your need for calcium will increase after menopause from 1,000 mg. per day to 1,500 mg. perday, and your doctor may recommend a calcium supplement.

Will I need to get additional exercise, and if I do, what kind of exercise is best? For a variety of menopause-related reasons, you will need to get regular exercise, preferably weight-bearing exercise. Walking is an excellent choice, and a regular routine of exercise will help with sleep disturbances, weight control, mood swings, as well as general hormonal balance.

Am I going to gain weight? As a consequence of growing older, you will not need as many calories as you did when you were younger. Careful attention to diet and adequate exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight.

Is my sex drive going to disappear? No, but as we all age, our sex drives will change. As with so much else about menopause, this is very individual and should certainly be discussed with your physician if you have any concerns.