

# Patient Education

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Women's Health Care Center/Roosevelt Clinic  
Women's Wellness Clinic/Seattle Cancer Care Alliance



## Menopause without Hormones

*A healthy lifestyle for all postmenopausal women*

**This handout describes ways to deal with:**

- **Hot flashes.**
- **Stress.**
- **Risk of osteoporosis (brittle bones) and cardiovascular (heart) disease.**

**These methods are safe for almost all women. They are low in cost, and often as effective as any known medication. Check with your health care provider to ensure that these methods are right for you.**

Menopause, the time when menstrual periods stop, can be a gradual, easy change – or not. Chemotherapy can cause the sudden onset of menopause; surgery to remove the ovaries always does. Even when it occurs naturally, menopause affects women differently. There are many ways to treat symptoms, and most do not involve taking estrogen (often not recommended for breast cancer survivors).

### Hot Flashes

Hot flashes (sometimes called “power surges”) are episodes in which the skin heats and sweating occurs, and is sometimes followed by chills. They can occur day or night, and they vary in frequency and severity from woman to woman. Hot flashes can be managed with these lifestyle changes:

- **Avoid triggers.** These include caffeine, alcohol, hot spices, tight clothing, hot weather, and strong emotions such as anxiety.
- **Exercise.** Walk, swim, bicycle, or find another physical activity that you enjoy. Exercise most days of the week for a total of 30 to 60 minutes per day. You can divide your daily exercise time into 2 or 3 separate sessions if needed.

- **Eat soy foods.** Some women find that increasing their intake of soy helps with hot flashes. Tofu, tempeh, edamame, and soy nuts are good sources of plant estrogens (phytoestrogens). Tofu should be cooked if immune function is decreased. For women with hormone-receptor positive breast cancer, large doses of phytoestrogens in pill or powder form have been questioned because of the possibility of stimulating tumor growth. Moderate use of soy foods (no more than 2 to 4 servings a week) may be safer for this group of breast cancer patients.
- **Try complementary treatments.** These treatments can include herbs such as black cohosh, or acupuncture and relaxation techniques such as paced respirations. Check with your provider before using supplements; some herbs contain phytoestrogens that may be contraindicated in breast cancer patients.
- **Ask your doctor about prescription treatments.** There are non-estrogen treatments for hot flashes. Certain antidepressants, such as Effexor, have recently been shown to decrease hot flashes in breast cancer patients. Gabapentin, a non-hormonal medication, has been shown to be as effective as estrogen in reducing hot flashes. Clonidine, a blood pressure medication that comes as a pill or patch, can help with hot flashes, but it can also cause low blood pressure. Talk with your health care provider to determine what is best for you.
- **Stay cool.** Use well-ventilated rooms and fans. Dress in layers and choose natural fabrics. Drink at least 8 glasses of cool water per day.
- **Reduce stress.** Practice a stress reduction technique (such as paced respirations) daily, and use it when you feel a hot flash coming on.

### Stress

“Change of Life” can be a meaningful phrase. Contrary to some earlier beliefs, menopause does not cause mood changes or depression in most women. It can for some, however. If hormonal and mood changes, medical treatments, or life changes create stress, this is a good time to discover or rediscover techniques for reducing that stress.

These are useful at any time of life:

- **Stay connected** with your community and nourish your friendships and intimate relationships.
- **Find a support group** you like. Groups have been proven effective in prolonging life.
- **Take charge.** Feeling in control drives away despair. Choose health care providers you are comfortable with. Learn about your treatment options, and work with your health care providers to choose your treatments.
- **Learn to relax.** Avoid tranquilizers. Instead, learn and practice activities that renew your spirit and tranquility (relaxation exercises, prayer, meditation, yoga, slow breathing, and humor).
- **Have a sense of purpose.** Find meaningful creative, volunteer, or community service activities.
- **Be physically active.** Regular, enjoyable exercise improves mood and body image, reduces stress, and increases feelings of self-control. Exercise elevates your body's natural "feel good" hormones. Try to achieve some type of exercise every day. Exercising daily with a spouse, friend, or family member allows you to exercise and spend quality time together.
- **Consider using homeopathic remedies** with the aid of a naturopath.
- **Consider psychotherapy or counseling** with a therapist chosen to meet your needs.
- **Allow yourself to grieve** for the loss of fertility and changes in your life.

## **Toward Strong Bones and a Healthy Heart**

A program of exercise and a healthy diet become especially important for maintaining the health of heart and bones at menopause. The combination of exercise and diet is extremely powerful preventive medicine. Bones become stronger when enough calcium and vitamin D are available in combination with weight-bearing exercise. Heart disease and the risk of breast cancer recurrence are reduced by a low-fat diet and regular exercise.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Ask your provider which set of numbers below should be used so you can reach your health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Women's Health Care Center, Roosevelt Clinic,  
4245 Roosevelt Way:  
206-598-5500

University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) patients, call:

After clinic hours, call:

Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) patients: call 206-288-7772

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
**MEDICAL CENTER**  
UW Medicine



**Women's Health Care Center/Roosevelt Clinic**  
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To help prevent osteoporosis and heart disease:

- **Enjoy exercise.** At least 30 to 60 minutes per day of moderate weight-bearing activity such as using free weights, doing yoga or tai chi, walking, stair climbing, or dancing can improve bone mass, balance, and reduce risk of heart disease by decreasing body fat.
- **Get enough calcium and vitamin D.** Most women should get 1200 mg of calcium per day. Women who are osteopenic or osteoporotic, or do not take hormone therapy should get 1500 mg per day. Calcium is found in dairy products, calcium-fortified juice and soy milk, dark green vegetables and dried beans, and calcium supplements. Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. Current recommendations for vitamin D are 600 to 800 IU a day. Vitamin D can be found in fortified foods, such as milk and juices, and in some fish. Most women require a multivitamin that contains vitamin D or an individual vitamin D supplement.
- **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** Select a diet low in salt, cholesterol and fat, especially saturated fat. Eat a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Ask your health care provider about a referral to a dietitian to discuss your specific needs.
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking increases heart attacks and osteoporosis, and accounts for about 1 of every 5 deaths in the US.
- **Manage stress.** (See pages 2 and 3).
- **Maintain a good body weight.** Being overweight by 20% or more increases risk of heart disease, cancer recurrence, and lymphedema. Abdominal fat in particular is a predictor of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.
- **If needed, consider medicines.** Approved medicines for preventing or treating osteoporosis are the bisphosphonates, (Fosamax, Actonel, Boniva) and the selective estrogen receptor modulator raloxifene (Evista). Tamoxifen (Nolvadex), often used to treat breast cancer, also has a protective effect on bones. For heart disease, make sure your cholesterol level, blood pressure, and blood sugar (if you have diabetes) are well controlled.

*Seattle Cancer Care Alliance is a collaboration of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, UW Medicine, and Seattle Children's*