



MENOPAUSE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

How does menopause affect sexual health and well-being?

Low estrogen levels after menopause cause a decrease in blood flow to the vagina resulting in vaginal dryness and decreased lubrication. This may make intercourse uncomfortable or painful. Vasomotor symptoms, sleep disturbance and mood alterations can also impact psychosexual well-being.

Do women experience a decrease in sexual drive after menopause?

While some postmenopausal women complain of reduced sexual drive, not all feel the same. Sexual drive and arousal may be affected by vaginal dryness, weight gain, mood changes and fatigue and chronic diseases like diabetes or heart disease and medications. However, in some women, sexual satisfaction may improve especially if there is intimacy with partner as there is less worry about unplanned pregnancy.

Do women still need to worry about pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases after menopause?

Since there is no ovulation, the chances of pregnancy with unprotected intercourse are low. However, the risk of sexually transmitted disease continues and may be higher due to vaginal dryness which increases the risk of genital abrasions or bleeding. It is also important to note that some women who have premature ovarian failure may still have some residual ovarian follicles and may have unplanned pregnancy.

How can vaginal dryness be managed?

Several options are available, including the use of local non-hormonal vaginal lubricants or topical estrogen creams. Oral menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) can also be considered in women with significant symptoms. The choice of the medication, risks and costs can be discussed with an endocrinologist or gynecologist.

What are the treatment options available for sexual dysfunction after menopause?

The initial focus should be on healthy diet, exercise, adequate sleep and relaxation techniques. Behavioral therapy and counseling sessions can help if there is stress and inter-personal conflict with the partner. Vaginal lubricants, topical estrogen cream or oral MHT can also be tried for short periods under the guidance of an endocrinologist/gynecologist.

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