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some of the funds
to make these booklets.

Menopause:

What to do
if you have
problems



NOTES:

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What can you learn from this booklet?

In this booklet, we talk about some of the things a woman can do that may help her feel well in menopause. Menopause is when your periods stop for ever and you can no longer have babies. Menopause happens to all women as they get older.

Some things that may give you problems

- You may have hot flashes
- Your periods may change
- You may have sleep problems
- Your moods may go up and down
- You may have a dry or itchy vagina
- You may find it hard to control when you pee



Every woman is different. Many women feel very well in menopause, but some find it a hard time.

Are there health risks in menopause?

When a woman reaches menopause, the hormone levels in her body change. This happens to all women, but for *some* there may be health risks. Two risks are:

- thin, weak bones (called osteoporosis), and
- heart disease



How do you know what is right for you?

As you can see, there are many things a woman can do to help her feel well when she reaches menopause. What works for one woman may not work for another. You can pick what works for you.

This booklet does not take the place of a visit to your medical doctor.

Please talk to your doctor or nurse when you need to know more about your own health.



Other VRRRI booklets on menopause topics:

- *Menopause: What is it? A booklet for women.*
This booklet is to tell you about menopause.
- *Menopause: What the hard words mean.*
This one helps you understand some of the hard words about menopause that doctors and nurses often use.

To get more copies of these booklets, please contact us at:

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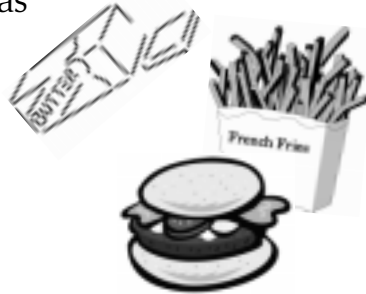
Eat healthy foods

- ✓ Eat food with lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre. All these help the body to stay healthy and strong.



- ✗ Do not eat too many foods that have a lot of fat or cholesterol, such as

- ✗ butter
- ✗ bacon
- ✗ meats like steak or hamburger
- ✗ fries



These make it harder for the heart to pump blood to the rest of the body. They may also make you fatter. You do not need to cut them out always, but do not eat too much of them.

Do yoga and meditation

- In yoga, you learn to stretch slowly and carefully and to breathe deeply. This helps your blood to flow around your body. It keeps your body strong and able to move well. It is also good for your heart.
- Meditation is good for you. When you breathe deeply, it helps your lungs and this also helps your heart. When you sit still and relax, or walk very slowly, it helps your blood pressure.



How other people can help you when you have menopause problems

There are two main ways other people can help you with menopause problems:

- HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) and other medications
- Alternative treatments

We will tell you more about these.

HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy)

HRT gives you the hormones that your body no longer makes. You can take HRT in different ways, such as



- pills or
- skin patches (like the ones to help you stop smoking)

Only your doctor can say if you may have HRT. Your doctor will check if it is OK for you. Women now use HRT less often than they used to.

Good things about HRT:

HRT may be good for women who have a lot of problems with menopause. HRT may help stop hot flashes, may help you sleep better, and may help your moods. HRT may also help keep bones strong.



Some women find that it does not help much, and some find that it helps a lot.

Bad things about HRT:

For some women, HRT may not be good for them. They should not take HRT if they have problems with their liver or their gall bladder (these **organs** are inside parts of their bodies). They should not take HRT if they have high blood pressure. Also, women who are at risk of breast or uterus cancer should not take HRT.



There are many things to think about before you take HRT. That is why it is very important to talk to your doctor about it. She or he can help you make up your mind.



Sometimes the doctor can pick other meds for you that will help you feel better.

Alternative treatments

Many women try other things when they have problems with menopause. We call these *alternative treatments*. These are not meds from your doctor. An *alternative* is another way to do something.



Alternative treatments may be:

- changes to how you live your life
- herbal treatments—pills or teas or skin creams
- ways to relax



this may slowly get worse as they grow older and other changes happen in their bodies.

Women who have more risk of heart disease may be those who:

- are in their 70s or 80s
- have high blood pressure
- have family members with heart disease
- smoke
- are very heavy



The best way to look after yourself so you do not get heart disease is to eat well and exercise.

Exercise

Exercise is the best way to keep the body fit

- It may help you stay a healthy size—not too fat or too thin.
- It helps make the muscles and lungs strong. When the muscles and lungs are strong, they make it easier for the heart to do its job.
- It may help to lower blood pressure and cholesterol (fat in the blood vessels).
- It may also help cut down the risk of different kinds of cancer.



- ✓ some juices and cereals have calcium added to them.

You may need to take extra calcium.

There are pills and also bottles of calcium drink you can buy at a drug store.



Some women with other medical problems may not be able to take calcium pills or calcium drink. Talk to your doctor or the pharmacist (in the drug store) to make sure it is OK for you.

Eat food with lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre. All these help the body stay healthy and strong. These are:

- ✓ milk, cheese and yogurt
- ✓ fruits and vegetables
- ✓ breads, cereals, pasta and rice (brown pasta and rice are better)
- ✓ meats like chicken and fish
- ✓ beans or soybean food like tofu.
- × try not to drink too much coffee, cola, black tea or alcohol.
- × do not smoke.



How to deal with heart disease

A small number of women may be at risk of heart disease after menopause. Your doctor will be able to tell you if you are at risk. For women who are at risk,

Changes to how you live your life:

It is good to get more exercise and eat well. You may find that if you wear really comfy clothes, you will feel better.



Herbal remedies:

Herbal remedies are pills, tea and skin creams made from herbs. You may get them from the drug store or the grocery store, or a health food store. You should talk to your doctor or the **pharmacist** before you try these. The pharmacist is the person in the store who is trained to get your meds for you. Some herbal remedies may not be good for you. When the doctor or pharmacist knows about your health and what other meds you take, he or she will be better able to tell you if herbal treatments will be OK for you.



Ways to relax:

Anything that makes you relax will help make you feel better. Here are some things you may try:

- ✓ Yoga
- ✓ Meditation (when you sit very still and just think about your breath as it goes in and out)
- ✓ A walk each day can make you feel relaxed



- ✓ Some people like to work in the garden in summer
- ✓ Some people have a massage (when a massage therapist rubs your muscles until you feel relaxed)



What you can do for yourself to feel well in menopause

If you think you may have reached menopause, you should talk to your doctor, nurse or caregiver. If they know, they will be able to tell you more about how to look after yourself.



HRT may be able to help you with many of the problems of menopause. So, we will only talk about other things that you can do for yourself.

How to look after yourself when you have hot flashes

A hot flash is when you suddenly feel very, very hot, even if the weather is not hot. This feeling often happens in the chest, neck and face. Your face and neck often turn red. It can last for just a few minutes or for over half an hour (30 minutes). It can happen many times in the day and even more often at night. It can wake you up. When you have a hot flash you sweat a lot. Then you may feel cold and shivery.



How to deal with thin bones (osteoporosis)

The best way to prevent osteoporosis is to keep the bones strong before menopause. Here are some ways to do this:



- ✓ exercise
- ✓ eat foods with lots of calcium
- × do not drink too much alcohol, coffee, black tea or cola
- × do not smoke.



Exercise

Exercise helps make your bones strong.

Just half an hour every day can make a big difference to you.



- ✓ Go for a walk, ride a bike, or swim. You can ask your doctor if it is OK for you to get more exercise.

Eat healthy foods

Eat foods with a lot of calcium.

These are:

- ✓ milk, cheese and yogurt
- ✓ dark green vegetables like spinach, peas and broccoli
- ✓ nuts like almonds and cashews
- ✓ grains like flax (you can find bread with flax in it)



to the toilet before or after you eat, even if you do not feel you need to go.

Health risks of menopause

We will talk here about some things you can do to cut down the risks of thin bones (osteoporosis) and heart disease. Please remember, these are not risks for every woman.

Risk of thin bones

HRT (hormone replacement therapy) may be able to cut down the risk of thin bones. Talk to your doctor to see if HRT would be the right thing for you.

Besides HRT, there are many other things you can do. The things we talk about here are good for everyone and can help *all* women become fitter.

If a woman has osteoporosis, her bones may break easily, even from just a short fall. A doctor can tell you if this is a risk for you.

Some women have more risk of thin bones.

- They may have small bones or be very thin.
- They may have family members with thin bones.
- They may smoke.
- They may drink lots of coffee, black tea, cola or alcohol.
- They may not get as much calcium as they need.



What to do when this happens

Pick clothes that help you feel OK

- ✓ Wear clothes that are cool and comfy on warm days. Cotton clothes are good.
- ✓ Wear layers of clothes so you can take some off when you feel too hot. A shirt and vest or light sweater is better than one heavy sweater.



Eat lots of fruits and vegetables

There are many fruits and vegetables that are good for you in menopause.

- ✓ Eat fruits like pears, plums, apples, grapes, strawberries, oranges and grapefruit.
- ✓ Eat vegetables like sweet potatoes or yams, brown beans, lentils, peas, and foods made from soy beans (such as tofu).



Do not eat foods that give you hot flashes

- ✗ Many women find that hot and spicy foods give them hot flashes.
- ✗ Other things that may bring on hot flashes are drinks like coffee, black tea and cola, and alcohol, such as beer or wine.



Changes in your periods

A period usually happens every month and it lasts for a few days. In menopause, this often changes.

- Sometimes, there may be a long time between periods, or there may be just a few days.
- Periods may last a very short time or go on for many days.
- There may be a lot of blood, or only a little.

If your periods change, it is important to tell your doctor, just in case you have other problems.



Be ready in case your period happens

- ✓ Carry extra pads or tampons in case you need them.
- ✓ Wear loose clothes in dark colours so that they are less likely to get stained with blood if you start a period.

When you find it hard to sleep

During menopause, you may find it hard to fall asleep at night or to stay asleep. This is often because of hot flashes. Any of the ways to deal with hot flashes may also help you sleep better.



Be comfortable and ready to go to bed

- ✓ Sleep in a cool room
- ✓ Keep the window open (unless it is very cold outside).



It is a very common problem for women as they get older. It happens because the skin and muscles that control your **bladder** (where your pee collects) become thinner and weaker. Tell your doctor if this happens to you. Sometimes it may be because of some other health problem. The doctor will check. If it is because of menopause, your doctor will give you exercises to do. These are called **Kegel** exercises.



Kegel Exercises

To do Kegel exercises, you must pull in your pelvic muscles and then let them relax, over and over. This makes the muscles strong. Your pelvic muscles are around your private parts and where you pee. Your doctor or nurse will help you learn how to do the exercises.



- You can do these on the toilet. Start to pee, then stop your pee for a short while, then let it go again.
- You can also do the exercises at other times. Just pull in and then relax those muscles around your private parts, while you sit or stand. No one can see you do it. Once you know which muscles to use, you can exercise anywhere.

Train your bladder

This means you make yourself go to the toilet to pee at the same times every day. It may mean you always go

When you do not want to have sex

Many women still like to have sex when they reach menopause. But some women may not want sex as much as they did before. This may be because they have less sex hormones. Also, women will often not want sex if it is painful.



- ✓ *Talk to your partner (your husband or lover).*
Your partner needs to understand that you do not want sex so often, or maybe even not at all. If you do not talk about the problem, he or she may think you do not love them any more.

A partner who understands about menopause and how your body feels may be able to help you and support you. Your partner should not make you have sex if you do not want it.



- ✓ Exercise. This may help you feel good, and may help you feel you want sex.
- ✓ Use a vaginal gel if your vagina is dry.

When you find it hard to control your pee

After menopause, you may find it hard to control when you have a pee. You may wet your panties a little bit sometimes, often when you cough or laugh. This may make you feel really bad about yourself. Some women may not want to leave home, in case it happens.

- ✓ Wear light night-clothes made of cotton.
- ✓ Do the same things each night before bed, and go to bed at the same time each night.
- ✓ Do not nap in the day time.

Exercise

- ✓ Exercise in the day helps to make your body tired at night. When the body is tired, it is easier to fall asleep.
- ✗ Do not exercise just before bed time, because this may wake you up.



When your moods go up and down

In menopause, some women may feel happy one minute and cranky or sad or worried the next—for no reason.

These mood changes may be because of changes in hormones. Or they may be because you have not had the sleep you need. Some women may feel sad because they know they will no longer be able to have babies.



Exercise

When you exercise, your body makes more *endorphins* in the brain. This is what makes you feel more happy and your body feel relaxed. Exercise may also be good for you because it helps you not to think about your worries and problems.



Do things you like

- ✓ Visit with friends who make you feel happy. People usually feel better when they talk to friends. Your friends may also have reached menopause. When you talk with them, you may learn from each other about menopause.



Do fun things and treat yourself

- ✓ Take a long bath.
- ✓ Eat something you really like.
- ✓ Watch a good TV show.
- ✓ Play with a pet animal.
- ✓ Do some crafts.



Do yoga

When you do yoga, you stretch slowly and breathe deeply. Most people can do it, with help from a good teacher. Yoga can help your body feel well.



- When you stretch, it helps your blood to move faster in your body. This may make you feel less tired.
- When you stretch, it also keeps you strong and able to move well.
- When you breathe deeply, you get more air in your body and that can help you feel more rested.
- Yoga can help your mood if you feel down.

Slow down your mind (Meditation)

- ✓ Find a quiet place to sit or walk, and think about how you breathe —slowly in and out. If you think about your breath, you do not have time to think about things that worry you.
- ✓ Breathe deeply. This can help you to relax.



When your vagina is dry or itchy

Dry or itchy vagina happens in menopause because a woman's body no longer makes all the hormones that keep the vagina wet. When you have a dry vagina, it can be painful to have sex.

Use gels made just for the vagina

- Gels made for the vagina help keep the vagina slippery. They also make it easier to have sex. Many women use gels when they have sex, even before menopause.
- You can buy gels at a drug store. Your doctor or the **pharmacist** (who works in the drug store) can tell you which one to use. KY Jelly and Gyne-Moistrin Gel are the names of two common ones.



Also, at menopause, your vagina skin gets thinner, so infections are more common. If this happens, you may feel itchy and have a **vaginal discharge**. You can tell you have this if your panties smell odd or have green or yellow stains.