

## **MENOPAUSE: A GLOSSARY**

**Bone density:** The volume of calcium and minerals within the bone tissue.

**Bone mass:** The total amount of bone tissue in the human skeleton.

**Cardiovascular disease:** Any abnormal condition characterized by dysfunction of the heart and blood vessels. CVD includes atherosclerosis (especially coronary heart disease which can lead to heart attacks), cerebrovascular disease (e.g. stroke) and hypertension (high blood pressure.) Women's risk increases after the age of 55 years or following menopause, whichever occurs first. Women who have heart attacks are twice as likely as men to die from them. Heart disease is the number-one killer of women in North America. After age 50, more than half of all deaths in women are due to some type of cardiovascular disease. More women die from heart disease than from breast cancer.

**Climacteric:** A period of years when a woman's hormone levels gradually decline eventually ending with the last menstrual period.

**Estrogen:** This group of female hormones is produced primarily by the ovaries and is responsible for regulating certain reproductive functions. There are three predominant estrogens in a woman's body: estradiol, estriol, and estrone.

**Estrogen Replacement Therapy (ERT):** A regimen in which only estrogen is supplemented; it is often prescribed for women after hysterectomies.

**Hormone:** A chemical messenger produced by a gland or organ that influences a number of metabolic actions in human cells.

**Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):** Replacing the hormones the ovaries no longer produce helps to lessen the symptoms of menopause. A combination of estrogen and progesterone is usually prescribed in the form of oral tablets, skin gel, injections or a vaginal ring or cream. Not for everyone, studies have suggested that HRT may increase the risk of heart disease, blood clots and stroke; also breast cancer and/or other side effects. Alternative

therapies and dietary supplements such as phytoestrogens are available for women who cannot or do not want to take HRT to counter or reduce the effects of menopause.

**Hot Flash/flush:** The most common peri-menopausal disturbance experienced by about two-thirds of all women during the peri-menopause. A hot flush is a sudden warm feeling in the face and/or upper body, accompanied by blushing, increased pulse rate, and sometimes perspiration. A cold chill may follow. The hot flush results from a change in the body's circulation. The usual underlying cause is decreasing or fluctuating estrogen levels.

**Induced menopause:** Immediate menopause caused by a medical intervention that removes or damages the ovaries.

**Libido:** Sex drive.

**Menopause:** The end of menstruation, confirmed after 12 consecutive months without a period, or when ovaries are removed or damaged.

**Natural hormone replacement therapy (NHRT):** Use of bio-identical (natural) hormones such as estradiol and micronized progesterone instead of the conventional Premarin or progestin.

**Night sweats:** A symptom of a menopausal woman's fluctuating estrogen levels, night sweats occur when a warm sensation causes the body to perspire.

**Osteoporosis:** A disease characterized by decreased bone density. When the bones lose density, they become porous and fragile leading to an increased risk of fracture, particularly in the hips and spine. There are many factors that affect a woman's risk for developing osteoporosis, but one of the most significant is menopause. Studies have demonstrated that estrogen plays a key role in maintaining bone density. After menopause, when estrogen levels decline, bone loss increases. Osteoporosis is much easier to prevent than it is to treat therefore it is essential to get enough calcium, vitamin D and exercise.

**Peri-menopause:** The six years or so immediately prior to natural menopause (not caused by any medical intervention) when changes begin - plus one year after menopause.

**Post menopause:** All the years beyond menopause.

**Premature menopause:** Naturally occurring menopause before age 40.

**Progesterone:** Endogenous hormone produced in female ovaries to prepare the endometrium for egg implantation and to maintain pregnancy. Serves to balance estrogen, promotes proliferation of uterine mucosa and prevents further follicular development.

**Testosterone:** Considered a male hormone but also produced in smaller quantities by the female body. Deficiency in women's testosterone is associated with loss of bone density, loss of libido and loss of the sense of well-being.

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