



Sexuality

While the end to monthly menstrual periods may be welcome, perimenopause and menopause may bring other, less desirable changes—hormonal and emotional fluctuations, and physical changes associated with the decline in estrogen levels. A variety of medical and non-medical options are available to help women maintain a healthy, fulfilling sex life in perimenopause and after menopause.

Sex after menopause

Many women continue to have satisfying sex after menopause. Research shows that sex after menopause can be therapeutic. It increases blood flow to the genital area, improving the long-term health of the sexual organs.

Sex drive

After menopause, some women may feel sexually liberated, free from worry about the risk of pregnancy. Others may feel a sense of loss associated with changes in their sexuality, or they may lose confidence and suffer a decreased sex drive. Though changes in sexual desire may occur, most women are able to continue having pleasurable sexual experiences.

Vaginal dryness

About half of post-menopausal women report experiencing vaginal dryness, soreness and/or pain during intercourse. Hormone levels decline during menopause affecting the tissues, muscles, glands and functions of the vagina and urinary tract. A variety of over-the-counter lubricants and/or vaginal estrogen creams are available. If dryness worsens and leads to prolonged pain or discomfort, you should consult your health-care provider.

Local hormone therapy

'Local' hormone therapies can provide some relief. These are therapies applied directly to problem areas—for example, a cream, tablet or ring may

be recommended to address vaginal symptoms and restore estrogen.

Testosterone supplements

Women who have had their ovaries removed may also notice a change in their sexual desire. Since surgical menopause can lead to reduced levels of testosterone—a hormone linked to sexual desire—testosterone supplements can help restore sexual desire.

Talking to your partner

Both women and men experience changes to their bodies as they age that can affect their sexual relations. Open communication and counselling support are important strategies for working through your issues together. Your health-care provider can provide valuable guidance.

Talking to your health-care provider

Discussing sexuality can be hard for some women. It may be helpful to make a list of concerns and ask the most important and difficult questions first. Take notes during your conversation with your health-care provider; ask for clarification on anything you don't understand. Bringing information you've gathered about your symptoms can make it easier to talk about the issues. If you don't feel able to discuss the subject, write down your concerns for your health-care provider.

The SOGC has developed a collection of information materials for women with menopause-related concerns, however your health-care provider remains the best front-line resource to answer your questions.

Visit www.menopauseandu.ca for more information about menopause and other women's health issues.