

MENOPAUSE FACT SHEET

#1 HOT FLUSHES

Menopause is a normal stage of life,
but this doesn't stop many women
feeling embarrassed when they go through it.

The average age for Irish women is between

48 - 55 years



This Fact Sheet focuses mainly on Hot Flushes, because when we see menopausal women in our three Well Woman clinics, most of them tell us this is the symptom which most concerns them.

We'll be releasing more online Menopause Fact Sheets shortly, on Sleep Disorders and on Contraception in the Peri-Menopause. We welcome suggestions from patients as to other aspects of the Menopause also. There is also a longer information section on the Menopause, available in hard copy from our three clinics, or on the website in Health Matters, **click here**.

WHAT SYMPTOMS MIGHT YOU HAVE?

- Hot flushes
- Interrupted sleep pattern
- Mood swings / anxiety / irritability
- Weight gain
- Headaches
- Hair loss
- Overactive bladder / urinary incontinence
- Loss of libido
- Vaginal dryness


Hot Flushes and mood swings are the most common symptoms in Ireland. Not so in Japan! Japanese women who drink a lot of green tea tend to have fewer menopausal symptoms, including Hot Flushes, than Western women.


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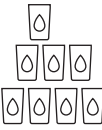
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MY MAMA TOLD ME THERE'D BE DAYS LIKE THIS


Nature isn't called 'Mother' without reason; some of the best Menopause advice sources suggest there are age-old natural cures and home remedies which might be worth trying if you feel your Hot Flushes are getting the better of you (even if these might not have gone through advanced clinical trials)


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Deep breathing – breathing exercises can help relax you, body and mind. Focus your mind on a peaceful image, breathe in and out, deeply and slowly. Deep breathing helps increase the supply of oxygen to the body.
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A relaxing bath – some naturopathic doctors believe a 20-minute soak in a bath can help keep Hot Flushes at bay. But don't have the water temperature too hot - slightly cooler than body temperature is ideal.
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Cool yourself down by **drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day**, and go to bed with a glass of water near at hand, in case of a mid-night Hot Flush.
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Green tea – Green tea has anti-viral and anti-bacterial qualities, and can help build your defences against flu. Its anti-oxidants can help cardiovascular conditions, and it is linked with fewer negative menopausal symptoms, including less Hot Flushes.
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Aromatherapy – A few drops of essential oil such as lavender, lime blossom or sandalwood in the bath can help ease your body and mind before bedtime. Alternately, put a few drops on your pillow, or on a tissue by your bed.
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Track your Hot Flushes – if they're persistent, or are causing you real embarrassment, it might also be helpful to keep a 'Hot Flush' diary, to help you track what might be responsible for triggering a Hot Flush. For example, what did you eat prior to the Hot Flush? How were you feeling? What were you wearing at the time? (and consider dressing in layers, so you can peel some of them off when a Hot Flush strikes).

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-  **Avoid really hot – as in spicy – foods**, and reduce or cut out alcohol, caffeine and smoking. These all have the effect of intensifying a Hot Flush.

-  Some women use a **homeopathic / naturopathic remedy** called Black Cohosh* (get it in health food shops). There are no clinical trials for this, and it isn't something we prescribe in Well Woman, but many women have found it helpful in reducing the intensity or frequency of Hot Flushes.

*Black Cohosh has been associated with liver damage in Ireland and other European countries.

SLEEPLESSNESS AND HOT FLUSHES

Sleep disturbances are also linked to Hot Flushes, and are one of the major symptoms experienced by menopausal women.

Fluctuating hormone levels and Hot Flushes can disrupt your sleep. Some experts who have studied menopausal women and sleep believe that a woman may wake up hundreds of times a night due to Hot Flushes. In this time, her heart rate may increase, and she might feel a heightened sense of anxiety.

As a starting point, try some of the solutions listed above, such as the relaxing bath, and deep breathing.



Try and integrate some **exercise** on a daily basis, even 20 minutes walking can help.



Get into a routine – go to bed at the same time each night, and get up at the same time in the morning.



Avoid alcohol and exercise in the 4 – 5 hours before going to bed. Don't have caffeine after 12 Noon.

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WELL WOMAN'S MEDICAL APPROACH TO THE MENOPAUSE

The symptoms of the menopause are so varied and seem to come and go for no particular reason. For example a woman can feel irritable and tired one day and be completely fine the next. She can have a few days of hot flushes every few minutes and then go for weeks with little or no flushing.

The ovaries slow down causing a decrease in the amount of oestrogen produced. It is mostly the loss of oestrogen that causes menopausal symptoms. However the reduction in oestrogen does not happen at a steady rate, which is why the symptoms fluctuate. For example it is normal for menstrual periods to stop for a few months and then restart again.

Many women just want to know that what they are experiencing is normal. A visit to your GP or a consultation with one of our Well Woman doctors to discuss what is happening can be reassuring.

Often women in their 40s have been fit and well, and may not have had any reason to see a doctor for several years. It is worthwhile having a **general check-up** to review current symptoms, past medical history, family history and lifestyle issues such as **diet, exercise level, smoking and alcohol use**.

Your doctor will also measure blood pressure and weight, particularly if you are overweight. Routine measurement of **blood count, thyroid function, blood sugar and cholesterol** can be useful baseline tests and occasionally detects problems such as anaemia in women who have heavy periods or under- or over-active thyroid disorders.

A **bone density scan** may be recommended, depending on whether or not you have risk factors such as family history, heavy smoking or previous fractures.

The majority of women who exercise, prepare their own food rather than eating processed food, and maintain a healthy weight tend to have less menopausal symptoms than those who eat a high fat diet and do little or no exercise.

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WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF HRT

However, there are some women for whom the hot flushes, poor sleep, anxiety / depression and irritability cause enormous disruption to their daily life. They cannot function at home or at work and they stop socialising due to the severity of their symptoms. In these cases hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be the solution.

HRT levels out the fluctuations in oestrogen hormones. Hot flushes and night sweats usually respond within two or three weeks. This often aids sleep and mood (if night sweats were affecting a woman's ability to get a good night's sleep). Women continue to have some flushing but the frequency and severity of symptoms are much less.

Most women taking HRT need to use it for two – three years. It masks the fluctuations in ovarian hormones during this time but does not stop the natural reduction in ovarian function that is happening. When they then stop HRT, the underlying fluctuations should have settled and HRT is no longer needed.

HRT can increase the risk of blood clotting problems such as deep vein thrombosis and prolonged use for more than four years has been associated with an increased risk of breast cancer. So women considering this medication should discuss the pros and cons fully with a doctor.

An alternative to HRT is clonidine which was originally used as a - not particularly effective - treatment to lower blood pressure. It helps hot flushes.

Another option is to use one of the newer type antidepressants. They have anti flushing effects and are particularly beneficial if the main problem is mood related such as anxiety or depression.

A good information website for advice on menopause is a UK based organisation Women's Health Concern. It is the patient arm of the British Menopause Society and has up to date information on the most recent developments on menopause management: www.womens-health-concern.org

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MENOPAUSE CONSULTATIONS IN WELL WOMAN

The initial consultation involves taking a full medical history including family history and current medication. Blood pressure and BMI are checked and a breast exam is done. If no blood tests have been done recently by your own GP, we will take routine tests for anaemia, thyroid function, diabetes and cholesterol. Other blood tests may also be taken depending on the clinical picture. Blood tests specifically checking ovarian hormones are not particularly helpful because they fluctuate from day to day so there is no test that will indicate just how far into menopause you are.

Treatment options are discussed and then depending on the history and symptoms treatment may be started straightaway, or you may wish to consider the information and return on another occasion if you wish to consider the options.

We ask all patients to advise Reception when booking the initial appointment that it is a Menopause Consultation because we can then allocate sufficient clinic time. Follow up visits are shorter and can be accommodated within a standard appointment.

To book a Menopause Consultation
in one of our three Well Woman clinics,

[CLICK HERE](#)