What is menopause?
Menopause is a normal change in a woman’s life when her period stops. That’s why some people call menopause “the change of life” or “the change.” During menopause, a woman’s body slowly produces less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. This often happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years. A woman has reached menopause when she has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

What is perimenopause?
While menopause is the permanent cessation of menstruation, perimenopause is the time immediately prior to menopause.

What are the symptoms of menopause?
The lower hormone levels in menopause may lead to hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and thin bones. Some women may experience few problems; others may find that these symptoms interfere with their quality of life.

What is hormone therapy for menopause?
Hormone therapy (HT) for menopause has also been called hormone replacement therapy. To help women with menopausal problems, women are often given estrogen or estrogen with progestin (another hormone). Like all medicines, HT has risks and benefits. Talk to your health care provider about using HT. Most professional women’s health organizations recommend using only products that have been well-tested, have carefully regulated manufacturing standards, and are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Who needs treatment for symptoms of menopause?
For some women, many of these changes will go away over time without treatment. Some women will choose treatment for their specific symptoms and try to prevent bone loss. If you choose treatment, estrogen alone or estrogen with progestin (for a woman who still has a uterus or womb) can be used.

What are the benefits of using hormones for menopause?
Hormone therapy is the most effective FDA–approved medicine for relief of your hot flashes, night sweats, or vaginal dryness. Hormones may reduce your chances of getting thin, weak bones (osteoporosis), which break easily.

What are the risks of using hormones?
For some women, HT may increase the chance of getting blood clots, heart attacks, strokes, breast cancer, and gallbladder disease. For a woman with a uterus, estrogen increases her chance of getting endometrial cancer (cancer of the uterine lining). Adding progestin lowers the risk. The potential risks, as well as the possible benefits of HT are different for every woman. It is important to talk with your doctor about this one-on-one.

Should hormone therapy be used to prevent memory loss or Alzheimer's disease?
Do not use HT to prevent memory loss or Alzheimer’s disease.
**Are herbs and other “natural” products useful in treating symptoms of menopause?**

At this time, we do not know if herbs or other “natural” products are helpful or safe. Many over-the-counter products are not regulated by the FDA. Talk to your doctor before taking any hormone products for the treatment of menopausal symptoms.

**Which women should not use hormone therapy for menopause?**

Women who think they are pregnant should not take hormones. In addition, women who have had a stroke or heart attack, or who have had certain kinds of cancer should not use HT.

**Whether or not I choose hormone therapy, what can I do to improve my health during menopause?**

It is important to eat right, exercise, and watch your weight; have your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar checked; and talk with your health care provider about taking calcium and vitamin D.

**Should hormone therapy be used to protect the heart or prevent strokes?**

Do not use HT to prevent heart attacks or strokes.

**Does it make a difference what form of hormones I use for menopause?**

The risks and benefits may be the same for all hormone products for menopause such as pills, patches, vaginal creams, gels, and rings. Together, you and your doctor can decide which therapy is right for you.

**How long should I use hormones for menopause?**

You should talk to your health care provider. Again, hormones should be used at the lowest dose that helps and for the shortest time that you need them.

**Do hormones protect against wrinkles?**

Studies have not shown that HT prevents aging and wrinkles.

Adapted from www.fda.gov/womens/menopause/mht-fs.html.

The opinions expressed in this handout do not necessarily reflect those of Dr Utian or any other contributing author.

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**Resources**

- **American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists**
  www.acog.org

- **American Society for Reproductive Medicine**
  www.asrm.org/Patients/mainpati.html

- **Association for Reproductive Health Professionals**
  www.arhp.org/patienteducation/index.cfm

- **MEDLINEplus Health Information**

- **National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women’s Health**
  www.npwh.org/Menopausal-Women/index.htm

- **National Osteoporosis Foundation**
  www.nof.org

- **North American Menopause Society**
  www.menopause.org/consumers

- **US Food and Drug Administration**
  www.fda.gov/womens/menopause