WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSE?

This is a time when fertility declines and periods stop (commonly between 40-55 years age). Understanding "the change" is the first step towards coping with this event.

Every woman's menopausal symptoms are individual. Some have few problems, others are more affected both physically and emotionally.

REMEMBER

*Contraception is important - unprotected intercourse can still result in pregnancy. Continue to use contraception after monthly bleeding has ceased for 2 years if you are under 50, or 1 year if you are over 50.

*You should seek advice for all irregular "spotting" or bleeding.

*If you do decide to see your doctor, it helps to write down a list of questions to take with you, including the date of your last period.
Some of the possible symptoms:

- **Period pattern changes** to become irregular, lighter or heavier and shorter until they finally stop, or they can stop abruptly.
- Hot flushes
- Hot sweats
- Vaginal dryness
- Urinary problems
- Bloatedness and tension
- Emotional symptoms - loss of confidence, sleeplessness, tiredness, anxiety, generally not coping, mood swings.
- Reduced interest in sexual relations.
- These symptoms are caused by low oestrogen levels.

More serious long term effects linked to the menopause may be:

- **Osteoporosis** - reduction of bone density
- **Cardiovascular disease** - heart disease is a leading cause of death in women after the age of 50.
HELPING YOURSELF - THE NATURAL WAY

1. Relax and let yourself "float" with a flush or hot sweat.

2. Try cutting down on strong tea, coffee or alcohol.

3. Talk to someone about it - your partner or a woman friend.

4. Use a lubricating jelly/cream to ease vaginal dryness.

5. Take regular exercise to strengthen bones and heart.

6. Eat a balanced diet to help you feel and look good.

7. If you smoke try to cut down or better still stop completely.

8. There are many alternative therapies and supplements that some women find helpful. However, you must consult your doctor before trying these.

9. Your doctor may be able to recommend ways of helping e.g. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), support groups or relaxation techniques.
WHAT IS HRT AND HOW DO I TAKE IT?

Hormone Replacement Therapy is a substitute for the hormones in our bodies which naturally decline during the menopause.

HRT can be taken in the form of:

- Tablets (oestrogen & progestogen)
- Skin patches
- Implants (oestrogen)
- Vaginal creams/pessaries (oestrogen)
- Skin gels (oestrogen)

If you still have your womb the replacement will be oestrogen and progestogen which may give you a monthly "bleed".

If you have had a hysterectomy, the replacement will be oestrogen.

HRT may help relieve the symptoms if these are due to the menopause, and can be taken for many years, but it is not necessarily suitable for every woman.

HRT will help protect you against osteoporosis and heart disease especially if you have had an early menopause caused by having a hysterectomy and/or removal of your ovaries.

Looking after your health is important when taking HRT - you should have regular blood pressure checks and breast examinations.

It is a good idea to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of HRT with your doctor.
Further Information

The Amarant Trust
11-13 Charterhouse Buildings
London
EC1M 7AN 01293-413000

Women's Health Concern Publications
Wellwood
North Farm Road
Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN2 3DR 0181-7803007

National Osteoporosis Society
Barton Meade House
PO Box 10
Redstock
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Avon, BA3 3YB 01761-432472

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