



## Topic

# Best Evidence Summary for Managing Menopause

Menopause means that a woman is at the end of her child-bearing days. A woman has reached menopause when they have not had a period (menstruation or monthly bleeding) for at least a year. This usually can be at any age between 45 and 55<sup>1</sup>

Indigenous women are less likely to seek treatment for menopause than non-Indigenous women, but little is known about the different cultural groups' experiences of this stage of life<sup>2</sup>. It is important to check locally about the best way to talk about menopause with Indigenous women.

### Why worry about Menopause?

Menopause is a natural part of getting older. But some women can have changes that cause other health worries and can affect their relationships with partners and other family. According to the **Jean Hailes Foundation**, when women get closer to menopause ...they might experience some of physical and emotional symptoms such as:

- hot flushes and night sweats
- aches and pains
- a feeling of crawling under the skin or itching
- headaches
- a dry vagina (can make sex uncomfortable)
- have less interest or desire for sex (reduced libido)
- needing to wee (urinate) more often
- tiredness
- irritability (feeling cranky)
- depression (feeling sad all the time)
- trouble sleeping
- not feeling good about themselves
- forgetfulness (having trouble remembering some things)
- Not all women will experience menopause symptoms : For every 5 women

- ◊ 1 will have **NO** menopause symptoms
- ◊ 3 women will have **MILD** symptoms
- ◊ 1 woman will suffer **SEVERE** symptoms



### Who is at risk for these problems?

#### Women who:

- are overweight
- smoke – these women may reach menopause 4 years sooner, have more hot flushes & increase their risk of getting lung cancer, heart disease or osteoporosis (weak bones)

## What can practitioners do?

Talk to women about:

- eating a healthy diet – ‘women who are overweight can have more hot flushes than those with a healthy weight’ and are at greater risk of heart disease.
- drinking six to eight glasses of water each day, cutting down on caffeine drinks (coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) and alcohol – these can cause hot flushes
- having more high calcium, low –fat dairy foods to help with healthy bones
- encouraging 30 minutes of physical activity, such as walking most days
- ways to manage hot flushes, such as using fans, water sprays, cool drinks and clothing
- help to stop smoking
- mood changes – this can affect relationships & whole families if women are having trouble sleeping due to hot flushes, night sweats and feeling irritable. Some women will have serious changes in mood such as depression. Talk about getting extra help from a counsellor or psychologist if worried.
- medication options that can help with symptoms. Refer to a doctor or other appropriate health professional for management.
- whether or not they still should use contraception. Women can still get pregnant until they are fully through menopause.
- the need to still have regular pap smears until the age of 70 and to get checked by a doctor if there is any bleeding after menopause.
- the need to check breasts regularly, have breast screening every two years after age 50 and contact a doctor or suitable health professional if any changes are found at any time.
- whether partners and family members might like some information to help understand what is happening for women who are going through menopause.<sup>1</sup>

## The key message from the evidence is that:

Menopause is a natural part of life, but the effect on women can vary from mild to serious health problems. It is important to help Indigenous women talk about and manage their menopausal symptoms and provide appropriate health promotion and social support <sup>2</sup>.

## References

1. <sup>1</sup>Jean Hailes for Women's Health (2015) Managing menopause. Retrieved 5th May 2015 from <http://www.managingmenopause.org.au>
2. <sup>2</sup> Jones, E., Jurgenson, J., Katzenellenbogen, J. & Thompson, S. Menopause and the influence of culture: another gap for Indigenous Australian women? Jones et al. BMC Women's Health 2012, 12:43 <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6874/12/43>