

Menopausal Symptoms: Women

Up to 40% of women experience menopausal symptoms because of breast cancer or breast cancer treatments. Menopausal symptoms depend on the type of chemotherapy a woman receives and may include the following:

- Hot flashes, especially in women who are taking tamoxifen (Nolvadex) to prevent breast cancer recurrence (return of the cancer)
- Night sweats
- Vaginal dryness, itching, irritation, or discharge
- Painful sexual intercourse
- Difficulties with bladder control
- Depression
- Insomnia

Managing symptoms: hot flashes

Estrogen or progesterone treatment for women may help with hot flashes and osteoporosis (loss of bone mass that makes bones break easily), but often the goal of breast cancer treatment is to remove these hormones. Therefore, estrogen and progesterone are not usually recommended because there is a possibility that they may speed up the growth of the cancer. The following treatments may help relieve menopausal symptoms:

- Some antidepressants (such as venlafaxine [Effexor] and paroxetine [Paxil])
- Vitamin E supplements and clonidine (Catapres), a blood pressure medication, may help relieve hot flashes
- Black Cohosh (herbal supplement) has been reported in some studies to help with hot flashes
- Exercise
- Deep breathing and other relaxation techniques
- A cooler room temperature
- Vaginal lubricants, estrogen creams, or estrogen rings may help relieve vaginal dryness (with the Doctor's approval)

Soy supplements have not been proven to relieve hot flashes.

Managing symptoms: osteoporosis

Hormonal treatments for breast cancer remove estrogen from the body. However, a loss of estrogen increases the risk of osteoporosis. The following activities may help reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis:

- Perform weight-bearing exercise, such as walking 20 to 30 minutes per day.
- Maintain an ideal body weight.
- Take vitamin D supplements (400 to 800 international units [IU] per day) and calcium supplements (1500 milligrams [mg] per day for women without previous osteoporosis, 2000 mg per day for women with previous osteoporosis), but be sure to talk with your doctor before taking supplements.

In addition, your doctor may recommend a bone density test or offer other medications, such as alendronate (Fosamax), calcitonin (Calcimar, Cibacalcin, or Miacalcin), or raloxifene (Evista).

For more information go to web sites: www.aboutcancer.com or www.wellspringoncology.org