

— *The* —

# MENOPAUSE Booklet

— eBook —



**MenopauseCentre**  
Australia

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*This booklet briefly explains how your treatment program works. It answers many commonly asked questions about how soon your menopausal symptoms should subside, how and when you need to fine tune your treatment, as well as when you can expect to stop treatment.*

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# Welcome to the Australian Menopause Centre (AMC)

Our aim is to provide you with a treatment program of Bio-identical Hormone Replacement Therapy (BHRT) designed to help your menopausal symptoms subside as quickly as possible. Every woman is physiologically different and will also be at a different stage of menopause. This is why we individualise our approach on a person by person basis.

We will recommend a starting point for your treatment based on your medical history as well as your current symptoms. We may use pathology testing of your hormones as a helpful diagnostic tool. We encourage your regular feedback so that we can understand how best to address your symptoms over time.

When you start your treatment program, we will stay in regular contact throughout your time with us. Based on your feedback, relevant medical history and any investigation results, we will counsel you and if necessary, adjust your medication dosage to ensure that you gain the best symptom relief with the lowest required treatment dose.

Our skilled staff are delighted to have the opportunity to assist you and we assure you that we will endeavour to provide you with our prompt, personal and professional attention.

Kind Regards,



**Dr Gary Aaron**  
MEDICAL DIRECTOR  
Australian Menopause Centre

# Introduction

## What Is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural change that occurs in a woman, marking the end of her monthly menstrual periods, sometimes referred to as “cessation of the menses”, “the climacteric” or “change of life”. Menopause is the last stage of a gradual biological process in which the ovaries reduce their production of sex hormones. Most of the symptoms of menopause come from decreased production of the hormone oestrogen. This process progresses gradually over a period of time. It is rare for a woman to be menstruating after the age of 55.

## When Will It Occur?

The average age of menopause is 51 however some women can experience symptoms from age 35 or earlier. It is most common for menopausal symptoms to occur between the mid forties and early fifties. Sometimes a woman will follow the same course as her mother.

Menopause can be induced by surgically removing the ovaries. Early onset of menopause may also occur from cancer therapy, certain illnesses or diseases and smoking.

## What Are The Symptoms?

Menopause is an individual experience, therefore symptoms and intensity of symptoms will vary from person to person. Typical symptoms are night sweats, hot flushes, mood swings, anxiety, depression, insomnia, vaginal dryness (painful intercourse) and loss of libido (low sex drive).

# Phases of Menopause

The phases of menopause can be characterised as follows:

## 1 | Pre Menopause

can occur from age 35 onwards and women may have regular periods but be experiencing menopausal symptoms.

## 2 | Peri Menopause

can occur in the middle to late 40s and women may experience irregular menstrual periods and symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats, mood swings or depression. Peri-menopause, is perhaps the most difficult to treat and can require multiple changes in hormonal supplementation. Many women simply do not cope well with this erratic time in their life.

## 3 | Menopause

is marked by the end of monthly bleeding and signals a major decline in oestrogen production. It could be said to have commenced when a woman in her 40s or 50s has not had a period for six months or more. If it has been 12 months since her last period, then menopause is almost certain.

## 4 | Post Menopause

represents the first five or so years after menopause. The lack of oestrogen released from the ovaries leads to several changes. These may include decrease in bone density, rising levels of cholesterol and other lipids in the blood, and other physical changes. Hot flushes, night sweats and mood swings may occur during this phase, although these generally decrease within one to two years.

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*Despite a commonly held belief, menopause is not an end ~ it is a beginning. Most women will live at least one-third of their lives after menopause. Menopause can be described as the beginning of a new phase in a woman's life that will bring different expectations, opportunities and experiences.*

# Getting Started

This section outlines the steps involved as well as what to expect when you first commence the treatment program. Also included is some general information and some useful health and lifestyle tips that may help you minimise your symptoms and improve your quality of life

## Our Goal

Our goal is to provide you with a BHRT treatment program designed to adequately control your menopausal symptoms, and to provide a low dose treatment to accommodate your body's requirements. We will assist you in reaching that goal by us first arriving at a starting point for your treatment and then monitoring your situation until such time as you are ready to be weaned off the treatment.

### STEPS IN BRIEF

- 1** In order for us to arrive at that starting point we will require:
  - A detailed medical history, where we will ask you relevant questions pertaining to your health.
  - A description of your current menopausal symptoms
  - Results from pathology and or other investigations

Our staff will assist you organising this in advance of your first consultation with one of our doctors.
- 2** An initial consultation will then be booked for you with one of our doctors. Based on the information and the outcome of your first consultation, our doctors will suggest an appropriate course of action.
- 3** Frequent follow up with you by our patient care team during the initial phase of your treatment.
- 4** Continuing regular follow up, providing you with our counsel and assistance along the way.
- 5** Finally assisting you to wean off the treatment.

# What to Expect in the First Four Months

It's important to understand that it may have taken years for your body to become hormonally imbalanced - it's not possible to correct this instantly.

Every woman will respond differently. Response will also be dependent on the particular stage of the menopause a woman is at. Your response will be in accordance with your body's natural sensitivity and absorption rate of the various hormones. You may experience rapid symptom relief or, as is more usually the case, this may take a number of weeks.

Some women, especially in the first 14 days after starting BHRT, may experience an increase in hot flushes and night sweats. These may actually increase in intensity and frequency before they start to reduce. This may be due to what we refer to as an "oestrogen dip" - this is when your body reduces production of its own oestrogen in response to the BHRT supplementation.

When you begin your treatment program, you may experience symptoms that reflect insufficient supplementation or over-sensitivity to the hormones. These symptoms may include uncomfortable reactions such as:

- Insufficient response to the medication ~ your symptoms haven't completely subsided
- Break-through bleeding
- Breast tenderness
- Bloating
- Headaches

Your response to the medication should stabilise over a period of time.



## Adjusting Your Initial Dosage

If you are experiencing any unwanted symptoms including any of those set out above, it is important that you contact the AMC help line on 1300 883 405 and book an appointment as soon as possible.

## Regular Follow Up

One of our goals is to provide you symptom relief using the lowest required dose of BHRT for as short a duration as is required.

In order to fine tune your treatment and reach this goal, your treatment dosage will from time to time require a review.

If after your initial consultation with one of our doctors, you decide to join our program, we will contact you as follows:

After the date your first medication is dispensed, you will receive a Welcome Call from us where we will go over the details of your treatment program and establish that you have received what is needed to start your treatment program. We will also then schedule follow up clinical reviews with our clinical team. We will then contact you regularly during this time.

You will also be able to contact us for advice.

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*At all times it is vital that you take the medication according to the instructions supplied with the medication and the advice given by our medical team.*

# How Long Will You Remain On The Program?

It is normal for women to remain on the program from anywhere between two and five years (some women may require treatment beyond five years.)

Treatment duration is determined by your body's adjustment to the menopause and its ability to eventually cope without supplementation. With ongoing regular testing and assessment of your symptoms we will be able to guide you through your program.

## Reducing Your Dependency

The rebalancing process involves two different but equally important hormones.

Oestrogen can be effective for hot flushes, night sweats, low energy, skin dryness and vaginal dryness but in excess can cause fluid retention.

Progesterone can be effective in reducing anxiety, mood swings and stress. It also helps release excess fluid from the body and helps with hot flushes and improves sleep.

While both of those hormones offer positive benefits, the benefit of one hormone can be offset by the other if dosage levels are not carefully monitored. For example, oestrogen causes fluid retention while progesterone acts like a diuretic and helps with fluid release. It is important to ensure that while we are weaning you off your treatment, the correct balance is maintained.

The duration of the complete process of weaning off BHRT may vary but may be as short as just a few months. Each month during the weaning off process we will determine from you, based on your feedback, how you are progressing and whether or not any of your symptoms have returned. Together with you, we will consider each month whether or not to reduce your medication any further. Of course, if any symptoms return during this process, you should contact the Australian Menopause Centre immediately.

# Your Medical Checklist

As part of your treatment program, we may recommend that you undertake specific medical tests. These will be advised by our doctor during your consultation. In addition, we suggest that you consult with your general practitioner and have the following tests:

## ✔ Pap Smear - Every 2 years

(unless you have had a hysterectomy or if you are being followed for previous abnormal smears).

## ✔ Mammogram - Every 2 years

Especially if over the age of 50. Some women, with a family history of breast cancer, may require a mammogram yearly and from an earlier age. Regular self examination of your breasts is also recommended.

## ✔ Blood Pressure - At least every 12 months

(more regularly if on blood pressure medication).

## ✔ Cholesterol Levels

Consider an initial assessment of your cholesterol and other blood lipids, especially if you are overweight or you have other risks of having elevated cholesterol, e.g. a family history of heart disease. Further testing will depend on this initial result.

## ✔ Blood Sugar Levels

An initial assessment of your blood sugar is advisable. Further testing will depend on this initial result.

## ✔ Bone Scan

An initial bone scan is advisable. Further bone scans will depend on this outcome.

As a patient of the Australian Menopause Centre we encourage you to maintain these regular medical checks and also strongly advise that you inform us of your results. We do recommend a yearly blood test and clinical reviews with our clinical staff. If you find that you have not had a review or scheduled 12 monthly blood test, please remind us when you speak with your care consultant.

# Compounding Of Hormones

## Prescribed By Doctors and Compounded To Order

The Hormones used in BHRT have chemical structures identical to those the human body produces naturally and are commonly referred to as being “bio identical”. Bio identical hormones with the appropriate strength to assist in relieving your symptoms cannot be dispensed over the counter of a retail pharmacy. They can only be dispensed by prescription.

Your BHRT medication will be individually compounded as prescribed by our doctors according to the specific dose and combination you require. Because these hormones are compounded specifically, our doctors can tailor a formulation to suit. Furthermore, the medication can be finetuned over time to increase or decrease the strength. The pharmacy that compounds the medication is a dedicated compounding pharmacy and uses only British Pharmacopoeia (BP) or United States Pharmacopoeia (USP) grade products. Good manufacturing practices and principles, along with using the highest grades of raw ingredients ensure the quality of the medication dispensed.

## Fresh Is Best

It is very important that to get the best results from any medication, is to ensure that it is used before its expiry date. Compounded medication has an expiry date of 3 months from the date of dispense. We encourage patients to use their medication as prescribed by the doctor and to ensure that they do not use out of date medication.

This usually means that you will well and truly use your prescribed does well within the expiry date. Your health is too important to take unwise and unnecessary risks by using medication that is past its expiry date. You will find us committed to ensuring that you use your medication properly. It is part of our duty of care to continually monitor your progress and to ensure you get the best result from fresh and effective bio-identical hormones.

# How to Take Your Medication

## Your Starting Dose

Our initial aim with your treatment program is to balance your levels of oestrogen and progesterone - the two hormones responsible for the majority of your symptoms. To facilitate this goal most patients will initially receive two separate packs of medication as troches, (most patients are prescribed troches):

- one pink pack containing oestrogen (translucent colour)
- one blue pack containing progesterone (white colour)

For patients who are prescribed creams or other forms of BHRT, please refer to the instructions accompanying your medication.

Keeping your dosage of the medication low will be the most desirable outcome for you. Therefore some dosage adjustments may be required to ensure you get the most effective result.

The purpose of these separate packages is to allow your doctor or nurse to make dosage changes as and when required. If you are taking this medication for the first time, you should have received enough medication to last you approximately 4, 8 or 12 weeks depending on your particular program.

If you experience over-sensitivity to your BHRT, please contact the AMC Helpline immediately.

It is important to understand that you may have been in a state of hormonal imbalance for many years and correcting these levels may take a few months.

Through the course of the program your doctor may prescribe a change of medication dosage for you.

It is very important that you follow instructions from our medical team in relation to any changes to your medication and dose.

# Prescription Delivery

## Automatic Monthly Repeats

Medication will automatically be dispatched regularly, either monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly to patients on a automatic dispense and payment plan (if you are not on a direct debit payment plan please call the Australian Menopause Centre to arrange one). This is to ensure you never run out of medication. It is vital to maintain regular daily doses and to ensure you always have a fresh effective supply.

If you are not home at the time of delivery the courier will try to leave the medication at an agreed delivery point (near the front or rear door / veranda and out of the sun or your local post office for pick up).

It is important to notify AMC immediately if you have changed your address.

## What to Do if Your Medication Has Not Arrived

A courier delivers your medication to you, but occasionally a batch does get lost.

It is important to contact us immediately if you have only seven days or less medication left and have not received the next month's supply. Please do not leave notifying us to the last minute as it does take 2-3 days to arrange replacement dispenses.

Each prescription is individually compounded to order at a specialised pharmacy. It can therefore take approximately five working days from the time you contact us until your medication actually arrives at your requested delivery location. It may take slightly longer for remote areas.

# Important Points Regarding Medication



*If you have been late in starting your medication, please call us so that we can resynchronise the delivery of your next batch.*



*If you have not received your expected delivery of medication, and you have only 7 days medication left, please urgently call us on 1300 883 405. We will need to follow up to ensure that you do not run out.*



*Whilst you are on our program we strongly suggest that you **DO NOT** take any other forms of hormone therapy unless specifically advised by our Clinical team.*

# Understanding Your Menopause

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Menopause is literally the cessation of your menses, and the end of your menstrual cycles.







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