

# ■ Menopause & Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

A Guide to Understanding Your Options

## What Is Menopause?

Menopause marks the end of menstrual cycles — officially diagnosed after 12 months without a period. It usually happens between ages 45–55 and causes a drop in estrogen and progesterone levels.

## Common Menopausal Symptoms

- Hot flashes or night sweats
- Mood changes or irritability
- Sleep problems
- Vaginal dryness or discomfort during sex
- Lower libido
- Weight gain or bloating
- Joint pain or stiffness
- "Brain fog" or memory changes

## 1■■■ Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Purpose: Replaces the estrogen (and sometimes progesterone) your body no longer makes.

Type	Includes	Best For	Notes
Estrogen-only HRT	Estrogen alone	Women with a removed uterus	Reduces hot flashes, vaginal dryness, bone loss
Combined HRT	Estrogen + Progesterone	Women with a uterus	Protects uterus from estrogen-related cancer
Local (Vaginal) Estrogen	Cream, tablet, or ring	Vaginal dryness, pain during sex	Minimal absorption; safe for many women

### Benefits:

- Fewer hot flashes & night sweats
- Better sleep and mood
- Improved vaginal comfort
- Bone protection

### Possible Risks:

- Slightly increased risk of blood clots, stroke, or breast cancer with some types

- May cause spotting or breast tenderness initially

## 2 ■ Non-Hormonal Medications

If HRT isn't an option, other treatments can help:

Medication Type	Examples	Used For
Antidepressants (SSRIs/SNRIs)	Paroxetine, Venlafaxine, Escitalopram	Hot flashes, mood symptoms
Anti-seizure medication	Gabapentin	Night sweats, sleep
Blood pressure medication	Clonidine	Hot flashes
Neurokinin-3 antagonist	Fezolinetant (Veozah™)	Hot flashes (non-hormonal option)

## 3 ■ Lifestyle & Natural Approaches

- Dress in layers and use fans for hot flashes
- Avoid triggers (spicy food, caffeine, alcohol)
- Exercise regularly — boosts mood and bone strength
- Eat calcium-rich foods and consider vitamin D
- Mindfulness, yoga, and CBT can ease anxiety and sleep issues
- Supplements (soy, black cohosh, red clover) may help — discuss with your provider first

## Key Takeaways

- There's no one-size-fits-all solution.
- HRT is the most effective treatment for hot flashes and vaginal symptoms.
- Non-hormonal options are available for those who can't or prefer not to use hormones.
- Always discuss your personal risks and goals with your healthcare provider.

## ■ Talk With Your Provider About:

- Your symptoms and how much they affect your life
- Personal and family history of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, or blood clots
- Which form of treatment fits your lifestyle and health goals