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## Managing Menopause

Menopause is part of a woman's natural aging process and occurs when her ovaries produce lower levels of estrogen and progesterone, and she has not had a period (menstruation) for a full year. Typically menopause occurs between 42 and 56 years of age, with an average of 52 years old.

### HRT Safety

Since the Nurses' Health Study, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) use for women has dropped significantly. However, one of the benefits of HRT is its management of menopausal symptoms. A study from Boston has pitched estradiol vs venlafaxine (an SRI) to compare effectiveness and found that this "off-label" use of venlafaxine is effective in reducing vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes) and is a viable alternative for those who can't, or won't, use HRT.

### Treating Hot Flashes

Paroxetine, a serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SRI) traditionally used to treat depression, has been found to be of benefit for managing the hot flashes associated with menopause. The American FDA recently approved its use for this purpose and the first product, Brisdelle®, has hit the market stateside. Hot flashes affect approximately 75% of menopausal women and this product represents the first, official, non-hormonal treatment option.

### Alternatives to HRT

Many women cannot use hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to manage menopausal symptoms due to medical concerns, such as breast cancer. Relief for these women can be elusive. Anaesthesiologists in Chicago looked at using a nerve-blocking injection into the stellate ganglion of the neck and found a reduction in the severity of symptoms that persisted up to three months. More research is needed to confirm this treatment, but it is an exciting development.

### Lifestyles Changes Reduce Symptoms

Menopause is not a "disease," but passing through this phase of life can result in significantly debilitating symptoms for some women. Often, making some lifestyle adjustments will help to ease this transition. A pilot study in the USA has found that weight loss – more than 10% of weight or 5% body fat – significantly reduced hot flashes. Ninety-four percent of the women participating were satisfied with the intervention! Frankly, that's better than a lot of drugs!

There is a lot more to health than lack of illness and a lot more "treatment" options than medications. There is plenty that each of us can do, personally, to improve our wellbeing. Talk to your pharmacist about those options.