

ROCK MY MEN♀PAUSE

What are the alternatives to HRT?

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Menopausal symptoms can be effectively treated with hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and in most cases the benefits of HRT outweigh the risks. However, there may be circumstances where you cannot take HRT, for example if you are undergoing treatment for certain cancers. You may prefer not to take HRT and wonder what you can do to help the symptoms without medication.

Make healthy choices

There is evidence that a healthier lifestyle can help menopausal symptoms.

- Regular exercise can improve hot flushes and night sweats, and improve sleep as well as helping you maintain or lose weight.
- Weight bearing exercise such as walking, running and dancing can improve bone strength.
- Spicy foods, alcohol, caffeine (tea and coffee as well as chocolate and cola drinks) can make hot flushes worse, so avoiding these may help.
- A healthy balanced 'Mediterranean style' diet based on fresh fish, vegetables and good fats such as olive oil is good for general health.
- Wearing light, breathable clothing in daytime and at night can make you more comfortable.
- Try reducing stress through CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), mindfulness, yoga or just doing something you enjoy!
- Complementary therapies, such as acupuncture, can be tried but at present there is limited scientific evidence of any benefit.

OTC herbal preparations

There is very little evidence that herbal preparations help, and in some cases they can even be harmful. 'Herbal' does not mean 'safe'. In fact many prescribed medicines, such as aspirin, are actually derived from plants, but people don't generally think of it as herbal.

Some common herbal preparations include:

- Red Clover
- Black Cohosh
- St John's Wort.

Some of these can cause significant risk, for example if you have a past history of breast cancer, particularly Red Clover and soy-based products. Black Cohosh has been associated with an increased risk of liver disease. There is evidence to show that St John's Wort can help with mild anxiety and depression symptoms, but it interacts with many other medications and you should always tell your doctor if you are taking this.

WHAT CAN YOUR DOCTOR DO TO HELP?

There are a few other medications that your doctor can prescribe for your symptoms. These include antidepressants such as citalopram or venlafaxine. These may help hot flushes and improve your mood. Medications such as clonidine and gabapentin have been tried and may also reduce hot flushes, but they have side effects of their own such as tiredness, weight gain and nausea.

There are alternative lifestyle choices and medications which may help with menopausal symptoms, but they are not necessarily safer or as effective as HRT. Discuss these alternatives with your doctor so that you can decide what is best for you.

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