



# Breeze through menopause

Fed up with the mood swings, insomnia and hot flushes of menopause? We called in expert help! BY DELIA DU TOIT

**A**fter years of suffering through period after period, you might welcome the dawn of your menopausal years. Until the symptoms start.

Dr Natalia Novikova (drnovikova.co.za), a Cape Town gynaecologist, says menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 58, but that the symptoms can last for anything from one to seven years.

## What's happening?

During the early transition to menopause, levels of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone often

**DURING THE EARLY TRANSITION TO MENOPAUSE, LEVELS OF THE HORMONES OESTROGEN AND PROGESTERONE OFTEN RISE**

rise, causing breast tenderness, bloating, fluid retention, mood swings and sleep problems.

Later on, symptoms can also include hot flushes, vaginal dryness and osteoporosis as oestrogen levels drop. Some women also notice changes in their hair and skin.

Some women experience almost none of these symptoms, while

others have such severe symptoms that they interfere with daily activities.

## Symptomatic relief

A healthy lifestyle will go a long way towards easing symptoms, says Novikova. Stress reduction, exercise, avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol (particularly red

**WHEN TO WORRY**

Although irregular bleeding can be one of the normal signs of transition to menopause, you should contact your gynaecologist if you bleed more often than every 21 days, if your flow is very heavy, if it lasts for more than eight days, or if it occurs after six months without any bleeding – a pelvic ultrasound will be necessary to exclude any sinister causes of bleeding. Regular mammograms and blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol checks become more important during and after menopause, as low oestrogen levels increase your risk of diseases that can be identified with these tests.



wine) will help. “You should also try to avoid processed food, refined sugars and red meat, and increase your intake of fibre, complex carbohydrates and vegetables,” she adds.

“Supplements that can help include essential fatty acids, selenium and vitamins C and E for hot flushes; calcium, vitamin D and magnesium for bone health; and vitamin B for dry skin and hair.”

For vaginal dryness, lubricants such as K-Y gel can help during intercourse.

*Sleep tight!*

Quality sleep is important to ease the symptoms of menopause, but often difficult to get while dealing with hot flushes. Try these tips:

- 1/ Add a fan such as **Kambrook Mist Fan, R1 599**, for cross-flow in the room and a wind-chill effect on your skin.
- 2/ Invest in a **cooling mattress cover**, or opt for **natural fibres** for your sheets and pyjamas.
- 3/ It sounds counter-intuitive, but a **warm (not hot) bath an hour before bed can help**, because the moisture evaporating from your skin can cool you down. Don't be tempted to take a cold shower; your body will simply heat up to counteract the chill.
- 4/ **Staying hydrated** helps your body regulate temperature, so drink water before bed.
- 5/ Eating and drinking raises body temperature slightly, so **don't have your dinner late**. Caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods are known triggers for hot flushes, so avoid these at night.

**Treatment options**

The best treatment for most of the symptoms is hormone replacement therapy (HRT) – but it's only done if your symptoms interfere with daily life, as it carries some risks, says Novikova. “If you still have your uterus, oestrogen and progesterone will be prescribed together. If you don't have a uterus, you can take oestrogen alone. But you should avoid it if you've ever had breast, uterine or endometrial cancer, blood clots, liver disease or a stroke.”

Other treatment options include antidepressants or blood pressure medication, but they aren't as effective as HRT.

To treat dryness and the often-accompanying incontinence and infections, a new laser therapy called Femilift can work wonders. “It's performed in-office, with no down time, and most patients only need three treatments performed four to six weeks apart,” says Novikova. 🍀

*In-store now!*

**These supplements, available at Clicks, can help ease the symptoms of menopause:**



**GNC Herbal Plus Black Cohosh Extract 40MG 100 Capsules, R169;**

**Vital Menopause 30 Capsules, R149;**

**A.Vogel Menopause Formula Drops 30ml, R91<sup>99</sup>**