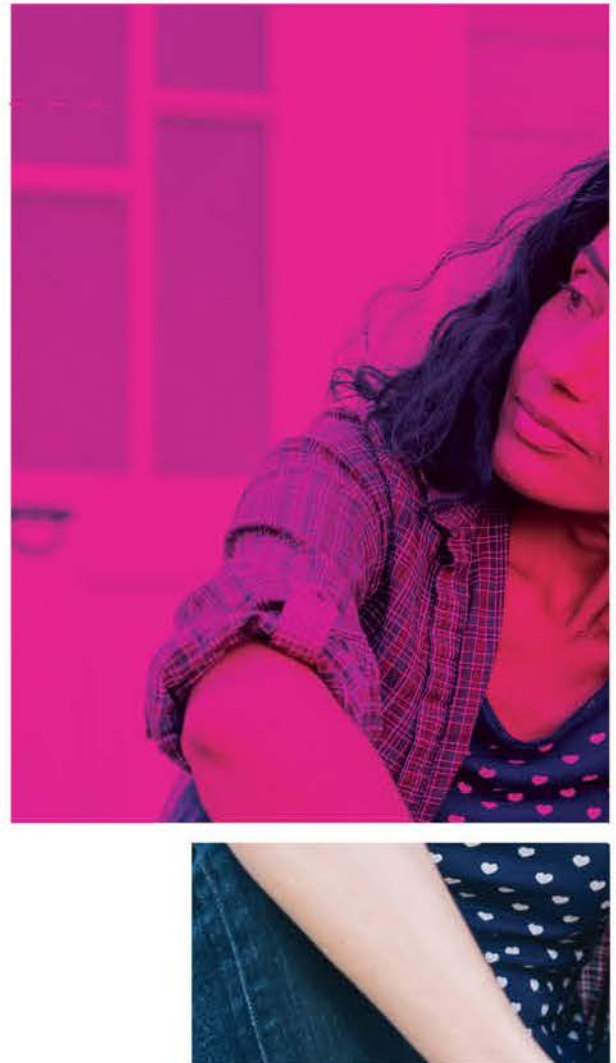


HYPERPIGMENTATION, OFTEN CALLED 'AGE SPOTS,' CAN OCCUR AS ESTROGEN LEVELS DECREASE, LEADING TO INCREASED MELANIN PRODUCTION AND DARK SPOTS ON THE SKIN.



Navigating Menopause

>>> BY DEBRA STEVKO MILLER >>>

*Empowering
women to take
charge of their
health*

The change. The pause. Hot flash hell. Most women know what those familiar terms refer to: a natural part of aging known as menopause.

The onset can start as early as age 40 during the perimenopause phase and last several years. Actual menopause occurs around age 51 signified by the end of monthly menstruation for 12 months.

While sweating, mood swings, and headaches might be typical for many women, seeking treatment for other hormonal imbalance symptoms can be an awkward conversation to have with a physician.

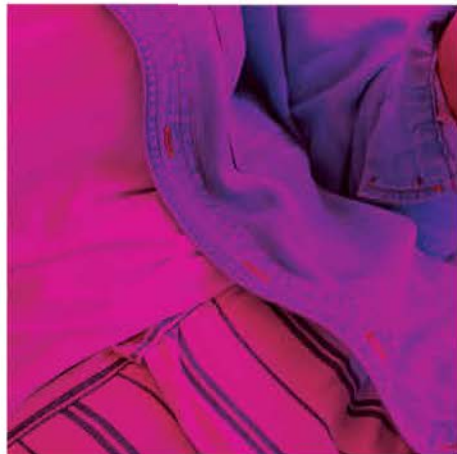
Suzette Erdos Johnson, MD, is a board-certified gynecologist at Atlantic Medical Group in the Atlantic Health System specializing in women's sexual wellness.

She believes that women should discuss any concerns and symptoms they have without trepidation.

"Patients need to be empowered to advocate for their own health," she said. "Don't be afraid to ask your doctor questions. If they don't have the answer or they can't help you, ask them to recommend someone who can. Be upfront about it."

With different remedies available to correct this hormonal imbalance, a health care professional will initially order tests and evaluate an individual's medical history as well as their comfort level with the risks and benefits for options such as hormone replacement therapy, hypnosis, cognitive behavioral therapy, nonhormonal treatments, or plant-based bio-identical hormones.

THESE SUDDEN WAVES OF HEAT, OR HOT FLASHES, CAN DISRUPT DAILY LIFE, BUT VARIOUS TREATMENTS AND LIFESTYLE ADJUSTMENTS CAN HELP MANAGE THEIR IMPACT.



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Getty Images



Suzette Erdos Johnson, MD,
board-certified gynecologist at
Atlantic Medical Group, Atlantic
Health System

Photo courtesy of Atlantic Health System

HAIR THINNING AND HAIR
LOSS ARE COMMON YET OFTEN
OVERLOOKED SYMPTOMS
OF MENOPAUSE, CAUSED BY
HORMONAL CHANGES THAT
AFFECT HAIR GROWTH CYCLES.

Photo courtesy of Getty Images

Board-certified Nurse Practitioner Wyndham Pursley of Virtua Health specializes in women's primary care and advocates for new formulations using soy- and yam-based hormones identical to and recognized by a woman's body.

"It's incredibly important that people maintain an open mind about these treatment modalities not only for symptoms but for long-term health benefits," she said. "We're not here to hurt people, we're here to help people."

It was back in 2002 when prescriptions for menopause hormone therapy (MHT) declined dramatically according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), due to results initially interpreted from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study that said MHT was harmful. The research, being conducted on women with an average age of 63, was halted and actually saved the lives of older women who had subsequently decided to stop taking MHT.

Then, just two years ago, the WHI report was further clarified to say that it was young women in early menopause who would actually benefit from MHT and were less likely to experience adverse effects. When Dr. Johnson read this new conclusion, she was saddened at the missed opportunity for women in their 40s and 50s — especially

those who refrained from taking estrogen as a result of the way the WHI results were presented and misconstrued in 2002.

"I literally read this article and cried because it held information on how we misled women and have caused them harm by not providing them with the option of using hormones," she said.

An abstract from The Menopause Society position statement confirms the findings about hormone therapy:

For women aged younger than 60 years or who are within 10 years of menopause onset and have no contraindications, the benefit-risk ratio is favorable for treatment of bothersome vasomotor (menopause) symptoms and prevention of bone loss. For women who initiate hormone therapy more than 10 years from menopause onset or who are aged older than 60 years, the benefit-risk ratio appears less favorable because of the greater absolute risks of coronary heart disease, stroke, venous thromboembolism, and dementia.

Today, women are getting the help they need and feeling better from estrogen transdermal patches, gels, pellet injections, sprays and creams. But there are also other medications and treatments that can target chills, sleeping issues, weight gain, night sweats, vaginal dryness, hair or skin changes, and irregular periods.

"We are so used to women being nurturers taking care of everybody else," Dr. Johnson said. "And after they are done having their kids, they stop going to the gynecologist. The time when you really need to see your gynecologist is when you are aging and going through these changes because you are going to spend one-third of



Wyndham Pursley, board-certified
nurse practitioner, Virtua Health

Photo courtesy of Virtua Health

your life in the post menopause (phase) and that's a very important time of your life."

Addressing the physical and mental health concerns that accompany the change of life with a medical professional can be helpful. As always, recommended lifestyle modifications are encouraged such as exercise, a healthy BMI (body mass index), taking calcium and Vitamin D, avoiding smoking, limiting alcohol, eating heart-healthy foods, and knowing your family's medical history.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that women use FDA-approved hormone therapies since those are evaluated for safety and effectiveness. ❖