



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Take action to manage your symptoms on World Menopause Day

Menopause is an inevitable fact of life for women, yet many aren't aware of the impacts it can have on their health, or the treatment options available.

On World Menopause Day, 18 October 2009, the National Prescribing Service (NPS) is encouraging women who may be entering this phase of life to speak to their doctor about what symptoms they may experience and how symptoms can be managed.

"Women may not realise they are going through menopause, and put symptoms of tiredness, irritability and hot flushes down to stress," NPS senior clinical adviser, Judith Mackson said.

As women enter midlife, the production of oestrogen by the ovaries slows down, and eventually periods cease. The final menstrual period generally happens when women are between 40 and 58 years old; in Australia the average age is 51-52 years. During the slow-down of oestrogen production the change in hormone levels can cause symptoms such as hot flushes and/or night sweats, trouble sleeping and vaginal dryness. The severity of these symptoms varies from person to person.

Being prepared for menopause is important but many women don't feel confident discussing their options with a doctor.

"NPS has determined that Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is the most effective treatment if a woman decides to use a medicine to manage menopause symptoms. Research indicates that it can result in 75 per cent reduction in hot flush frequency per week compared to placebo," Ms Mackson said.

"However the decision to use HRT should be made jointly between the woman and her doctor, and should take into consideration the severity of symptoms, the individual's medical history, their family medical history and preference of treatment methods," she advised.

Negative media reports about HRT have led to an increased interest in alternate therapies such as vitamins and herbs, but be aware these therapies are still medicines; they can have side effects and interact with other medicines.

"Even though complementary medicines such as black cohosh, dong quai, and wild yam may appear safer, there is little clinical evidence supporting their efficacy. There have been reports of severe side effects from black cohosh. If you're thinking about using an alternate therapy to manage the symptoms of menopause speak to your doctor or pharmacist first," Ms Mackson said.

What to do if you think you're beginning menopause:

- Discuss any symptoms with your doctor, and give them your personal and family history relating to menopause and cardiovascular health
- Talk to your doctor about the harms and benefits of HRT
- Ask your doctor about how lifestyle changes can help relieve symptoms
- Tell your doctor about any medicines, including over-the-counter and vitamins or herbs, you are taking or thinking about taking
- Keep a record of any symptoms to discuss at your next appointment with your doctor

For further resources and to read other women's experiences with menopause visit www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/wh35syn.htm or www.jeanhailes.org.au

To find out more about NPS including prescribing information about HRT visit www.nps.org.au.

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