

Blog Post: Interactions with the Menopause Transition and Treatments

April 2024
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Do uncomfortable menopause-related symptoms send you searching for new options for effective relief? Numerous treatments, prescriptions, supplements, and therapies exist that promise to banish menopausal side effects like hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and fatigue.

But before you start any new treatment, you need to pause and ask yourself an important question: How will this new prescription or supplement interact with anything you're taking or plan to take? The answer may not be as straightforward as you think.

To get to the bottom of this question, we spoke with [Dr. Mache Seibel](#), a leading expert on women's health and menopause and author of books such as *The Estrogen Fix*. We discussed what women need to know about interactions with menopause treatments and a common dilemma facing many menopausal women.

What You Need to Know About Hormone Replacement Therapy and Menopause Treatment Gaps

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) led the market as the number one prescription in the country in 2000; at least half of women were taking some form of estrogen to relieve menopause-related symptoms. However, the [Women's Health Initiative \(WHI\) published a study](#) in July 2002 claiming HRT either causes or increases a woman's risk for breast cancer, heart attacks, and other chronic conditions.

Overnight, women stopped taking hormones, and the number of women taking HRT dropped to 2-3%. As a result of the study, women were left with the apparent choice between cancer and disease or symptoms like hot flashes. Many chose to suffer their symptoms rather than face any potential risks, and medication for menopause, like HRT, faded into the background.

Why the persistent knowledge gap about menopause treatments?

Faced with a widening gap between symptoms and available treatments, women began turning to alternative options, like [bioidentical hormones](#) and supplements. Still, only 30% of women today are taking anything (besides HRT) to relieve their menopause-related symptoms.

Why such a small percentage? A mere 30% of OB-GYNS receive training on menopause, noted Dr. Seibel, as do only 5-10% of primary care physicians. Treatment options for more severe menopause symptoms also [tend to be under-researched](#) or induce more uncomfortable side effects than initial symptoms.

But women and their healthcare providers need to know effective options exist—and how the body responds to diminishing hormones like estrogen—in order to treat menopausal symptoms and improve quality of life.

What You Need to Know About Estrogen, the Menopause Transition, and HRT

“Estrogen goes into every cell in your body and can help any menopause-related symptom,” said Dr. Seibel. “But if you choose not to take estrogen (often in the form of HRT), you must divide your symptoms in two: noisy and silent.”

Dr. Seibel went on to explain that “noisy” symptoms, like hot flashes, are the ones that bug you, and it is often easier to prioritize their treatment to alleviate physical or mental discomfort. However, silent symptoms associated with menopause, like osteoporosis and heart disease, can go unnoticed and untreated, often until it's too late.

“You have to take care of the sum of you and not *some of you*,” Dr. Seibel emphasized. Without sufficient estrogen during the menopause transition and postmenopause, you must take care of each of your systems impacted by the reduction of estrogen to make sure you’re meeting all your aging body’s needs.

That said, some women cannot take HRT or may want to try other options first. Natural alternatives like [supplements](#) or cognitive behavioral therapy for mental health, sleep, or hot flashes can also help relieve specific menopause side effects. If you choose this option, as many women do, it’s important to work with a healthcare provider to create an individualized plan to ensure you’re treating the sum of you.

What Medications for Menopause Can Cause Interactions?

Over [350 prescription drugs can interact with estrogen](#). If you’re currently taking prescription medication for anxiety, depression, or to help your sleep, for example, it’s essential to scan the list before starting any form of HRT. Estrogen can affect these drugs' effectiveness or cause adverse reactions, which may call for adjustments or alternative treatments.

Dr. Seibel also stressed that any two substances you put into your mouth, be it food, a supplement, or a prescription, can interact with one another. That's why you must provide a complete list of your medications *and* supplements when you see your healthcare provider. Even if you think what you're taking is small or inconsequential, it's best to bring it up just in case. Remember, he said, anything that claims to have an *action* can also have an *interaction*.

Common HRT Medication Interactions

Smoking while taking estrogen can increase your risk for blood clots. Many people may not associate smoking with taking a drug or medication, but nicotine is a potent substance in and of itself.

HRT can also interact with **thyroid medications**. “As many as 20% of women may have an underactive thyroid, and estrogen increases the protein in the blood that binds up any available thyroid hormone, which decreases the amount available in your bloodstream,” explained Dr. Seibel. Your healthcare provider can help you adjust your medication to prepare for this interaction.

Other common **prescription medications** with known estrogen interactions include epilepsy medications, HIV treatments, and antibiotics like doxycycline.

HRT can also deplete **vitamins** such as folic acid, B6, and magnesium. Healthcare providers often recommend that women taking hormones should also take a multivitamin due to this potential side effect. St. John’s Wort, a common herbal remedy to help alleviate depression, can also lower the effectiveness of HRT.

Understanding Interactions Before Treating Your Menopause-Related Symptoms

Every woman’s body tells a different menopause story. That’s why, in part, it can be a challenge to determine [what interactions someone may experience](#) due to genetics, medical history, and current medications and why there’s a [general lack of research about HRT interactions with other drugs](#).

“The most important thing for women to understand is that treatments are available for all their symptoms, and new treatments are becoming available all the time,” said Dr. Seibel. There are enough alternatives that, whether you choose to take hormones like estrogen or not, you can increase the quality of your life. For example, the [Mia Vita Sleep supplement](#) contains GABA (Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid), ashwagandha, L-theanine, and melatonin to influence the length and quality of your sleep during the menopause transition.

Keep in mind that the menopause transition window can last a long time and that your symptoms can evolve. For example, what you treat initially with targeted supplements may not be your primary symptom a few years later. Remember to always talk to your healthcare provider first to determine what you can safely take to best manage your menopause symptoms.