



# THE SUN CHRONICLE

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## Understanding and managing menopause

**T**here is a popular musical parody that takes a comical look at the stage in a woman's life called menopause. Many women accept menopause, or "the change," as a normal occurrence while others struggle to find anything normal about it. Understanding menopause may make it easier for women to manage.



**DR. MATTHEW ROGALSKI**  
STURDY  
MEMORIAL  
HOSPITAL

### What is menopause?

Menopause onset is the time, when looking back, at which a woman ceased having menstrual bleeding for the prior 12 months. Changes in menses can begin up to 10 years earlier and are referred to as perimenopause. Menopause marks the end of reproductive years that began in puberty, when the ovaries no longer release eggs each month and hormone production drops.

### Signs and symptoms

On average, women start menopause around age 51 and experience some of the following symptoms: hot flashes, night sweats, weight gain, mood swings, sexual difficulties, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression or irritability, muscle pain, and more (yes, more).

There are two blood tests that may be useful in determining if a woman has begun menopause. One measures the FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone) level and the other measures estradiol (the estrogen produced by ovaries). Your doctor can help you determine if testing for menopause, and subsequent treatment, is necessary.

Menopause affects women's quality of life and puts them at increased risk for other health issues, like osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke and breast cancer. It's important for women to feel comfortable engaging in discussion with their doctors about all of the symptoms they are experiencing. When you talk to your doctor, he or she can document when the symptoms started, explain what to expect, and provide guidance on treatment options to help relieve symptoms.

### Treatment options

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

### Health notes

is the main treatment used to manage menopausal symptoms in some women. It's medication that contains female hormones, either estrogen and/or progesterone, to replace the ones the body is no longer producing. Hormone therapy can be effective in relieving symptoms brought on by menopause. There are some risks associated with HRT, which is why an obstetrician/gynecologist, who specializes in women's health, or a primary care doctor should help a woman determine if hormones or another medical therapy may be right for her.

To begin managing the discomfort of hot flashes, I suggest keeping your home cool; dressing in layers; keeping a small fan handy when out; staying physically active; quitting smoking; decreasing alcohol intake; reducing your overall stress levels; eating healthy and getting adequate sleep.

Many women choose more holistic ways to relieve their symptoms, such as by doing certain exercises or eating certain foods. Managing menopause is as individual as the woman who is going through it so we tailor the treatment to what's best for them. All women cope differently with the changes that are occurring, and there is not one single treatment plan that works for everyone.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of keeping the mind and body as healthy as possible when a woman is going through menopause. Being knowledgeable about this time in your life and proactive about managing it, in partnership with your physician, will give the best results.

### More information

Additional resources can be found at [menopause.org/](http://menopause.org/); [womenshealth.gov/menopause/](http://womenshealth.gov/menopause/); and [acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Menopause](http://acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Menopause).

**DR. MATTHEW ROGALSKI**, FACOG, is a board certified obstetrician-gynecologist at the Foxboro Center For Women's & Family Health. The Foxboro Center for Women's & Family Health is one of 17 practices that make up Sturdy Memorial Associates. All of its physicians are associated with Sturdy Memorial Hospital.