

Menopausal Hot Flashes - new report states that women don't have to suffer, says International Menopause Society and American Society for Reproductive Medicine

International Menopause Society - press release

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Up to a quarter of women suffer a poorer quality of life because of hot flashes and night sweats associated with the menopause. Now the International Menopause Society (IMS) is marking International Menopause Day (18th October) with a new report highlighting problems associated with the menopause, and by issuing a joint call with the ASRM (American Society for Reproductive Medicine) calling for women and doctors to be more aware of the treatment possibilities for troubling menopausal symptoms.

The majority of women suffer from hot flashes or night sweats (also known as vasomotor symptoms, or VMS) during the menopause. The exact numbers vary by culture, ethnic group, and individual health background, but on average 25% of women experience debilitating or distressing symptoms. These symptoms include depression, discomfort and embarrassment, causing real problems for women, their partners and their families. On average these symptoms may last 4 years, although some women are less troubled whereas some women have significant symptoms which are longer-lasting.

The IMS commissioned a multi-disciplinary comprehensive review of the evidence behind hot flashes and night sweats (published in the peer-reviewed journal *Climacteric*). As a result of the review, the IMS and ASRM conclude that women should be less accepting of the problems caused by menopausal symptoms, and calls for women to be more proactive in asking for treatment.

Hot flashes are caused by dilation of the blood vessels and increased flow of blood to the trunk, head and neck. This can cause reddening of the skin, and sweating. Night sweats are hot flashes which take place during sleep, so disrupting sleep and causing fatigue and stress.

These symptoms can lead to physical discomfort, embarrassment, fatigue, and loss of confidence, often leading women to avoid social situations. The impact of hot flashes on quality of life varies with a variety of factors, including the frequency and duration of the flashes, a woman's lifestyle and how she views her symptoms. A woman may enter a 'vicious cycle', where the symptoms lead to problems in coping with her everyday life, which in turn leads to problems in coping with the symptoms.

The review concludes that Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) shows the best results in treating VMS, with up to 90% of symptoms being abolished within 3 months of starting the treatment. However, not all women can take HRT, and for them there may be alternatives such as SSRIs and other non hormonal medications as well as psychological methods of treatment (e.g. using cognitive behavioural therapy).

The IMS review cautions against the use of untested or unproven methods of counteracting VMS, and singles out 'bioidentical hormones' as an area of concern. Some techniques such as acupuncture have shown mixed results. Similarly, most relaxation therapies and yoga have not shown significant benefits.

IMS President, Dr Tobie de Villiers (Cape Town, South Africa) said

"Too often the distressing symptoms associated with the menopause are not taken seriously enough. The stresses caused by these symptoms can have a significant effect on not only a woman's life, but also the lives of those close to her, over a period of years. A woman can't just "grin and bear it" - if only it were that simple. These are troubling symptoms caused by the menopause, which lead to physical and psychological problems in everyday life.

Women need to realise that they don't need to put up with this. For most women there are ways of overcoming these problems, and a woman going through a difficult menopause should make sure that she talks this over with her doctor to find the best solution for her".

ASRM President, Dr Roger Lobo (who is also one of the report's authors), stated
"Vasomotor symptoms are a major source of concern for many women worldwide. It is most appropriate for IMS to bring this to the attention of the general public during the celebration of Menopause Day. ASRM is most pleased to partner with IMS in this effort, particularly since Menopause Day this year occurs while ASRM is conducting its annual meeting. Here there will also be a focus on research related to Menopause and presentations on a wide variety of topics related to Menopause. This program was coordinated by IMS and the Menopause Special Interest Group of ASRM".

Ends

Notes for editors

*The review paper, *Menopausal hot flushes and night sweats: where are we now?*, authors Archer DF, Sturdee DW, Baber R et al. appears in the peer-reviewed journal *Climacteric* 2011; ;14:515-28.

The full article is available at: <http://informahealthcare.com/doi/full/10.3109/13697137.2011.608596>

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The International Menopause Society is the main international academic society working with menopause medicine and ageing in women. The IMS organises the World Congress on the Menopause, with the next Congress taking place in Cancun, Mexico, in 2014. See the IMS website for more details, <http://www.imsociety.org/>