

Glossary Of Terms

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Medical terms that may confuse you when you discuss menopause with your healthcare practitioner

A

Amenorrhea – not having a period during the reproductive years

B

Benign – not life-threatening or dangerous – not malignant

Bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (BSO) – surgery where both ovaries are removed

Bioidentical hormones – a marketing term used to describe hormones that are chemically similar or exactly the same as the biological substance

Body mass index (BMI) – the ratio of weight to height

C

Cervix – the opening of the womb; the narrow end of the uterus that leads into the vagina

Cognition – intellectual functioning. Cognition is the action of knowing and includes all kinds of brain functions like memory, the ability to learn, facility with language and the way people solve problems.

Colonoscopy – a test that allows a doctor to examine the colon and rectum by means of a colonoscope inserted into the rectum

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Info

C

Conjugated equine estrogens (CEE) – a combination of several estrogens, isolated from pregnant mares' urine, including estrone, equilin and equilenin. Also called conjugated estrogens (CE)

D

Dementia – a gradual decline in cognitive functioning as a result of damage or disease in the brain beyond what is expected in normal cognitive ageing

E

Endogenous estrogen – the estrogen found in the body

Endometrial hyperplasia – thickening of the lining of the womb

Endometriosis – endometriosis occurs when endometrial cells grow outside the uterus. The endometrial cells can be found in the ovaries, the fallopian tubes and the pelvic cavity.

Endometrium – lining of the womb

Estrogens – a sex hormone that plays an important part in a woman's normal sexual and reproductive development. The ovaries produce the most estrogen. Estrogen regulates the menstrual cycle and reproductive health, as well as the heart and blood vessels, bones, breasts, skin, hair, mucous membranes, pelvic muscles, and the brain. There are three main estrogens that have estrogenic hormonal activity: estrone (E1) – the main estrogen produced by the body after menopause; estradiol (E2) – the main estrogen in the body during the reproductive years. It is the most potent type of estrogen; estriol (E3) – the main estrogen in the body during pregnancy

Estrogen agonist/antagonist – a compound which has different effects on the tissues in the body; it has beneficial estrogenic actions in some tissues but opposes the effects of estrogen on other tissues where estrogen activity may be harmful

Estrogenic or estrogenized – a state caused by estrogen

Evidence-based medicine – Doctors use the best available evidence from the most current academic research when making a clinical decision

E

Exogenous estrogen – estrogen taken or applied to the body in the form of a cream, gel or patch

F

Final menstrual period (FMP) - a woman's final menstrual period

Fluctuating levels of hormones – changing levels; in menopause changing levels of hormones

Follicle stimulating hormone – a hormone released by the pituitary gland. It helps regulate the menstrual cycle and stimulates the ovaries to produce eggs. A high level of FSH in a mid-life woman indicates menopause

H

Hormones – chemical substances that act as messengers throughout the body

Hormone therapy (HT) – also known as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and menopausal hormone treatment (MHT). This is a treatment that adds, blocks, or removes hormones. In menopause, hormones are given to adjust low hormone levels and to alleviate hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms.

Hypertension – high blood pressure

Hysterectomy – surgical removal of the womb

Hysteroscopy – a procedure whereby an instrument is passed through the mouth of the womb to allow the inside of the womb to be viewed

L

Libido – sexual desire

Lignans – plant estrogens

Local estrogen therapy – where estrogen treatment is delivered directly to the vagina. It's a local estrogen treatment and is not absorbed throughout the body. It can be in the form of a ring, cream or pessary that is inserted into the vagina.



M

Mammogram – specialized X-ray of the breast

Menopause – the last day of a woman's last period ever

Menstrual cycle – the cyclical changes that occur in the lining of the womb in preparation for accepting a fertilized egg. If there is no fertilized egg the lining of the womb is shed, causing a bleed, which is called a period (menstruation).

O

Oophorectomy – removal of the ovaries

Ovary – one of two structures in the female body, about the size of an almond, containing all the eggs of a woman's reproductive life

Ovulation – the process whereby the egg is developed and released from the ovary

Ovum – an egg in the ovary

P

Perimenopause – the time before; around and just after the actual moment of menopause

Pessary – a small oval suppository that is inserted into the vagina with a small applicator

pH balance – the normal, health acid balance; in this case, of the vagina

Phytoestrogens – estrogens that are found in plants

Postmenopause – the stage after the final menstrual period

Progestogens/progestins - are hormones that have similar actions to the endogenous hormone progesterone that circulates in a woman's body

Progesterone - Progesterone is a hormone released by the corpus luteum in the ovary. It has an important role in the menstrual cycle and is vital in maintaining the early stages of pregnancy.

R

Radical hysterectomy – surgery during which the womb, cervix and part of the upper area of the vagina, as well as the ovaries, are removed

Relative risk – the percentage of people at risk as per a given number

S

SERM – selective estrogen receptor modulator. These hormones have a beneficial estrogen effect in certain areas of the body and block unwanted estrogen effects in other parts of the body, so that the amount of active estrogen in the body is not increased

Serotonin – a brain chemical involved with mood, appetite and sleep

Sex-steroid hormones – special hormones that are involved with the growth and functioning of the reproductive organs. They are the hormones that affect male or female sexual characteristics

SSRI – selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor; a drug that slows the action of the enzyme that destroys excess serotonin and helps a certain amount of serotonin to remain circulating throughout the body, making people feel better. Many antidepressants are SSRIs and may be used 'off label' to alleviate hot flashes when hormone therapy is not an option

Stress incontinence – leaking when a woman laughs, coughs, sneezes, or lifts heavy objects

Systemic hormone therapy - available in a pill, transdermal patch, ring, gel, or cream— in this treatment a higher dose of estrogen and/or progestogen is absorbed throughout the body.

T

Timing hypothesis – the length of time after menopause that a woman starts on HT

Total hysterectomy – surgery where the uterus and part/all of the cervix are removed

Transdermal – absorbed through the skin as with some estrogen patches, creams or gels

Transvaginal ultrasound – an ultrasound performed via the vagina



U

Urge incontinence – an overwhelming urge to urinate and then leaking before reaching a lavatory

Urinary tract – all organs that are involved in the production and expulsion of urine from the body

Uterus – womb

V

Vagina – the passage that leads from the womb to the outside of the body; the area where the penis usually enters the body during intercourse

Vasomotor symptoms – symptoms such as hot flushes and night sweats that women experience in the menopause transition and sometimes into the menopause

