



# Healthy Women

Presented by the Coalition of Labor Union Women

## Menopause and Women's Health

Menopause is a natural transition period as women's ovaries stop producing estrogen. Women live one third of their lives after menopause—on average living to age 80. There are 37 million postmenopausal women in the United States. Women's health needs change significantly after menopause due to this reduction in estrogen production. It is important that women become aware of the new health risks they face and that there are options for preventing those risks.

Below are some of the health issues menopausal women need to consider. Women should discuss their risk factors and treatment options with their health care provider to plan for a healthy menopause phase of life.

### Three Phases of Menopause

**Perimenopause** usually begins in the mid-to-late 40's and can last five to seven years. During this time, menstrual periods become irregular and symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings or depression may appear. Early decline in bone mass begins.

**Menopause** is marked by the end of monthly menstruation and signals a decline in estrogen production.

**Postmenopause** is the third phase, when a series of far-reaching changes in a woman's body occurs. There are two stages:

- *Early Postmenopause* represents the five years or so after menopause. There may be "silent" changes such as bone loss and rising levels of cholesterol in the blood due to lower levels of estrogen.
- *Late Postmenopause* begins five or more years after menopause. The silent changes continue and may lead to the formation of diseases of the bones (osteoporosis) and cardiovascular system (heart attack and stroke).

### The Facts

- Approximately 28 million Americans are at risk for osteoporosis, 80 percent of whom are women.
- A woman can lose up to one-third of her spinal bone mass during the first six years after menopause.
- Forty percent of women over 50 are at risk of developing an osteoporosis fracture.
- A woman's lifetime risk of hip fractures is equal to her combined risk of developing breast, uterine and ovarian cancer.

## The Facts

- Heart Attack and Stroke** → Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death among women.
- Coronary heart disease (CHD) kills more women than men each year.
  - A postmenopausal American woman is 10 times as likely to die of (CHD) as from breast cancer.
  - One in two women will eventually die of heart disease or stroke.
- Cancer** → One in every eight women will develop breast cancer during her lifetime.
- More than 50 percent of cancers in women are related to lifestyle factors such as smoking, obesity and diet.
  - Women with breast cancer face 10 times higher risk of osteoporosis and are unable to take estrogen.
  - Risk of breast or ovarian cancer increases with age.
- Depression** → Gynecologists believe depression is one of the most common symptoms of menopause.
- Decreased levels of estrogen may adversely affect serotonin levels and cause depression.
  - The impact of depression can be minimized by early detection and treatment.

## The Options

- ✓ A good diet, regular exercise.
- ✓ Estrogen and hormone replacement therapy (ERT/HRT) can treat symptoms of menopause (hot flashes, etc.) and can prevent some long-term health risks like osteoporosis, but may increase the risk of cancer.
- ✓ In addition, there are new options available to treat osteoporosis. Ask your health care professional about your options.

**Partner with your health care provider. Act now to prevent serious illness later.**

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