



Menopause Symptoms

Menopause symptoms, which can include hot flashes, night sweats, sleep disturbance, mood changes, and vaginal dryness, are common in cancer survivors. These symptoms can be caused by changes in the body's hormonal system, which can occur with certain cancer treatments. Talk with your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms. There are ways to help manage them.

Consider some of the following tips and lifestyle changes to cope with some of the most common symptoms of menopause.

Managing hot flashes

- **Avoid hot flash triggers:**
 - Stress, alcohol, caffeine, spicy food, hot showers, hot weather, overheated rooms
- **Keep your body temperature cool** with these strategies:
 - Wear loose clothing. Dress in layers.
 - Wear clothing made from materials that absorb moisture from the skin and dry quickly.
 - Keep a bottle of cool water with you.
 - Keep a small fan at your desk or bedside table.
 - Keep a hand fan with you.
 - At the first sign of a hot flash: Splash your face with cold water; run cold water over your hands; or place a cold, wet washcloth against your neck.
 - Take a cool shower before bed.
 - Sleep on cotton sheets and with one foot sticking out from under the covers.
 - Keep ice packs next to the bed if you wake up sweating.
 - Use air conditioning or a ceiling fan to keep the room temperature cool.
- **Maintain a healthy body weight.**
- **Exercise regularly.**
- **Avoid smoking.**
- **Practice relaxation and stress reduction techniques**, such as yoga, meditation, or breathing exercises.

If these techniques are not helpful, talk with your health care provider about non-hormonal or hormonal medication options.

Sleep issues

Try these tips to establish a regular sleep schedule and routine:

- Wake up and go to bed at consistent times, even on weekends. Avoid naps.
- Relax before sleep by reading a book, listening to music, or taking a bath. Turn off the television, computer, and cell phone.
- Create a comfortable environment that supports sleep: dark, quiet, and cool.
- For relief of night sweats, try the strategies to stay cool listed under “managing hot flashes.”
- Use the bedroom only for sleep, sex, and sickness.
- Avoid caffeine late in the day, ideally 4-6 hours before bed.
- Keep a journal or notebook near your bed to write down your worries or to-do items that might keep you awake.

Mood changes

During perimenopause or menopause, feelings of anxiety or depression may develop or worsen and moods may change frequently. Mood changes can affect emotional well-being, daily functioning, or relationships. If feelings of

anxiety or depression are making it hard to function or you have thoughts of harming yourself, **seek medical attention immediately.**

For all issues with mood changes, discuss these changes with your primary care provider or a mental health professional. In addition, sleep disturbance related to menopause can cause or worsen mood changes. Try the strategies to improve sleep listed under “sleep issues.”

Vaginal dryness

Vaginal dryness, including chafing, irritation, and tightness, is common after undergoing cancer treatment. This condition can also make sex painful. When sex hurts, sexual interest often quickly diminishes. Typical pain medications probably won't help, but there are a number of options for treating this problem.

Vaginal dryness may be addressed by using both **vaginal moisturizers** and **vaginal lubricants**.

- **Vaginal moisturizers**, which are available in gels, tablets, or liquid beads, provide a smooth layer of moisture that adheres to the vaginal tissue and improves the vaginal pH. They are applied with a slim applicator or a vaginal suppository two or more times a week. The best absorption occurs when used prior to bedtime.
 - Moisturizers are non-hormonal and available over-the-counter (without a prescription). *Examples include brand names Replens, Luvena, or Hyalo-Gyn.*
- **Vaginal lubricants** provide a temporary protective coating and should be applied in the vagina and around the genitals immediately before sexual activity.
 - **Petroleum-based lubricants** can irritate tissue, may damage condoms and diaphragms, and can increase risk of infection.
 - **Water-based lubricants** without perfumes or other irritants are best and wash away more easily. *Examples include brand names Astroglide, Liquid Silk, or Slippery Stuff.*

TIP: Use soaps and bubble baths sparingly, because they can dry vaginal tissue.

The **Friends' Place** store on the first floor of Dana-Farber's Yawkey Center for Cancer Care stocks vaginal moisturizers and vaginal lubricants. Visit the store or shop online at **www.dana-farberfriendsplace.org**. Such products are also available from other online retailers and your local pharmacy.

If vaginal moisturizers or lubricants are not providing enough relief, talk with your doctor about other types of treatment.

Still have questions?

To learn more, visit **www.dana-farber.org/sexualhealth** or contact a clinician in Dana-Farber's Sexual Health Program by calling **617-632-4LAD (Life After Diagnosis)** or emailing **dfci_adultsurvivors@dfci.harvard.edu**.

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