

Menopause After Cancer – Symptoms and Treatment

WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

Menopause is reached when you have gone 12 months without a menstrual period, marking the end of the reproductive years.

While menopause most commonly occurs between ages 45–55, it can happen earlier or suddenly for some women, particularly after cancer treatment.

EARLY AND PREMATURE MENOPAUSE

- **Early menopause:** between ages 40–45
- **Premature menopause:** before age 40

Early or premature menopause may occur naturally or after chemotherapy, pelvic radiation, surgical removal of the ovaries, or autoimmune or genetic conditions. Menopause under the age of 40 for unknown reason is called [Premature or Primary Ovarian Insufficiency \(POI\)](#).



READ ABOUT [MENOPAUSAL TREATMENTS AFTER EARLY MENOPAUSE OR CANCER.](#)

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COMMON MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS

Physical symptoms may include [hot flushes and night sweats](#), [irregular or absent periods](#), [vaginal dryness](#), [joint or muscle aches](#), and [fatigue](#).

Emotional and cognitive symptoms may include [mood changes](#), [anxiety or irritability](#), difficulty concentrating (“brain fog”), memory changes, and [sleep disturbance](#).

WHY DO SYMPTOMS OCCUR?

Symptoms are mainly caused by declining and fluctuating hormone levels, particularly estrogen. Estrogen affects the brain, bones and muscles, heart and metabolic health, and skin and vaginal tissue.

Read [“Understanding Hormonal Changes During Menopause”](#).

LONG-TERM HEALTH RISKS

Women who experience menopause at a younger age may have an increased risk of [osteoporosis](#), fractures, heart disease, and metabolic changes. Early assessment and appropriate treatment are important.

MENOPAUSE AFTER CANCER

Cancer treatments can affect ovarian function and hormone production. Menopause in this setting often occurs suddenly and symptoms may be more severe and prolonged. Management should be individualised and coordinated between your GP, menopause clinician and cancer specialist.

Read more from [The Royal Women’s Hospital](#).

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TREATMENT OPTIONS

Treatment decisions depend on symptoms, cancer type and treatment history, age, overall health, and personal preferences.

MENOPAUSAL HORMONE THERAPY (MHT)

MHT is the most effective treatment for hot flushes and night sweats and helps protect bone density. It may also support heart and metabolic health. MHT is often suitable for use after cancer but your cancer specialist should be consulted. It is usually not recommended for women with certain hormone-sensitive cancers, such as [estrogen receptor positive breast cancer](#).

[Watch our free on-demand HRT \(MHT\) workshop.](#)

NON-HORMONAL TREATMENTS

There are a range of [non-hormonal medical treatment options](#) to manage various symptoms, including hot flushes and sweats, sleep and mood disturbances, and [genitourinary symptoms](#). Consult with a menopause-informed health professional for advice.



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VAGINAL AND URINARY SYMPTOMS (GENITOURINARY SYNDROME OF MENOPAUSE, OR GSM)

Low-dose vaginal estrogen is highly effective. It works mainly in vaginal tissues and has very low absorption into your circulation so it may be considered even when systemic hormone therapy is not appropriate. Again, seek the advice of your cancer and/or menopause specialists.

Other effective strategies include the use of various vaginal moisturisers and lubricants, pelvic floor physiotherapy, [bladder training and medications for overactive bladder](#).

LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

Regular [weight-bearing and strength exercise](#), balanced nutrition including adequate calcium and vitamin D, limiting alcohol and caffeine, stress management, and healthy sleep routines can improve symptoms and support long-term health.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE

Seek advice if symptoms are intrusive or impact your functioning; if menopause occurs before age 45; if menopause follows cancer treatment; for sexual pain or urinary symptoms; or there are concerns about bone or heart health.

SUPPORT

Support may include menopause specialists, oncology teams, counselling, and peer support groups.

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CANCER SUPPORT SERVICES:

- ✓ List of [Cancer Support Organisations](#) by state and territory
- ✓ [McGrath Foundation](#)
- ✓ [We Can](#)
- ✓ [Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre](#)

Menopause & Cancer Resources

Podcast Episodes:



[Breast Cancer & Menopause: A Survivor's Raw Story from Struggling to Thriving](#)



[Menopause and Cancer Podcast](#)

Podcasts:



[Menopause and Cancer](#)



[Dear Menopause](#)



[You Are Not Broken](#)

USEFUL WEBSITES

-  [National Breast Cancer Foundation](#)
-  [The Royal Women's Hospital Victoria](#)
-  [Cancer Council](#)
-  [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#)

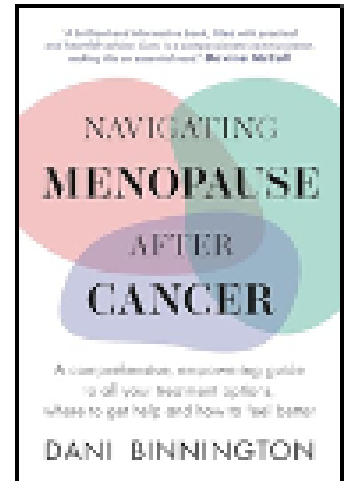
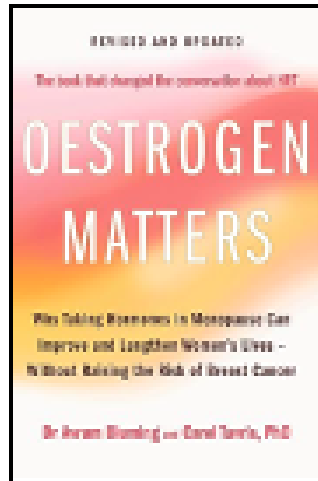
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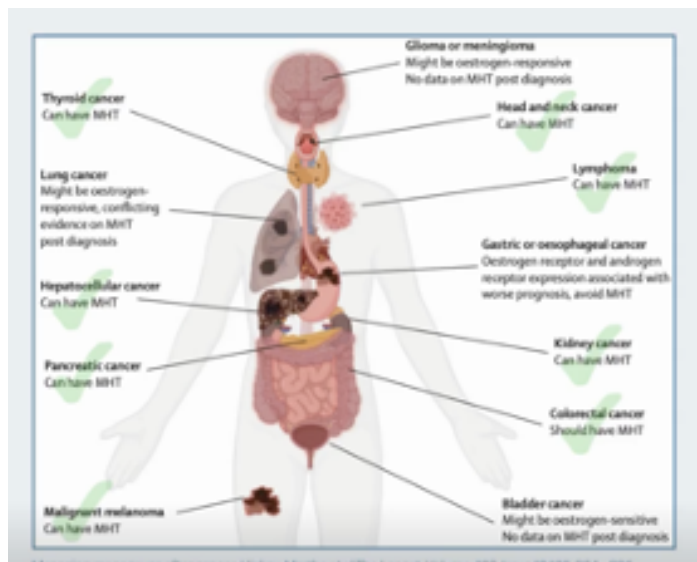
BOOKS



KEY RESEARCH PAPER

Hickey M, Basu P, Sassarini J et al. [Managing menopause after cancer](#)
The Lancet, 2024; 403, 984-996

	Effect of MHT on cancer outcomes	Level of evidence	MHT use
Haematological cancer	One small study (n=130) showed no effect on cancer outcomes ²⁹	Very low	Consider MHT
Early cutaneous malignant melanoma	One small study (n=206) showed no effect on cancer outcomes ³⁰	Very low	Consider MHT
Colorectal cancer	One large prospective study (n=834) ³¹ and one national cohort study ³² reported improved cancer outcomes	Low	Consider MHT
Hepatocellular cancer	One case-control study (n=244) reported improved cancer outcomes ³³	Very low	Consider MHT
Ovarian germ cell tumours	European guidelines suggest offering on an individualised basis ³⁴	Very low	Consider MHT
Epithelial ovarian cancer	Systematic review found uncertain evidence for efficacy or safety of MHT ³⁵	Moderate	Consider MHT
Vaginal, vulval, and anal squamous cell carcinoma	Do not express oestrogen receptors; MHT thought to be safe ³⁶	Very low	Consider MHT
Kidney cancer	Meta-analysis suggests better cancer outcomes with MHT ³⁷	Low	Consider MHT
Lung cancer	Mixed evidence: prospective cohort study (n=727) ³⁸ and SEER data (n=485) ³⁹ showed improved cancer outcomes; retrospective study (n=458) ⁴⁰ and RCT ⁴¹ showed increased mortality	Moderate	Consider MHT



(images taken from paper)

For further information and personalised menopause care, visit [WellFemme Telehealth Menopause Clinic](#).