



Cancer

With age often comes greater concern about the risk of cancer. Health-care providers treating menopausal women tend to pay particular attention to the risks of endometrial and breast cancer.

Risk factors

The risk of cancer increases only slightly with the onset of menopause. There are a number of other factors that can contribute to a woman's risk of cancer including:

- Body weight (if you are more than 20 percent overweight)
- Age at onset of puberty
- Age at time of first pregnancy
- Breastfeeding history
- Current age
- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Physical fitness
- Family history
- HT use

Breast cancer

All women face an increased risk of breast cancer as they age. In fact, breast cancer is more associated with aging than with menopause. It appears most commonly in women aged 60 and older; at age 85, women have a one-in-nine chance of developing the disease. Women who use combined estrogen-progestin hormone therapy (HT) for more than five years may increase their risk of breast cancer.

Hormone therapy

Many women considering hormone therapy (HT) to address menopause symptoms worry about its potential link to breast cancer. Current research shows that short-term, lowest-dose HT is a safe and effective treatment option for moderate to severe menopausal symptoms, unless a woman has a strong family history of cancer.

Women who develop cancer while taking HT do not necessarily need to stop treatment. Except in cases of brain tumours, breast cancer or widespread endometrial cancer, there is no evidence to suggest that HT increases the risk of recurrence. The risk of thrombosis also should be considered, as some cancers increase the chance of blood clots in the veins.

You should consult your health-care provider to determine whether HT is the right treatment option for you.

SOGC position on hormone therapy

According to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's *2006 Menopause Consensus Report*, HT is a safe and effective treatment option for moderate to severe menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, insomnia, difficulty concentrating and vaginal dryness. SOGC recommends that doctors prescribe HT in the lowest dose required, and for the duration necessary, to treat troubling menopause symptoms. Your health-care provider can help you understand the risks and benefits associated with HT.

Cancer screening

All women, regardless of age, should participate in regular breast cancer screening. Regular screening exams help with early detection. Pap smears screen for cervical cancer and mammograms screen for breast cancer. Colorectal exams screen for cancers of the colon and rectum and are recommended for everyone over the age of 50. Screening programs vary by province and territory in Canada. Find out what is available in your area and how you can participate.

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Additional resources

A Guide to Coping with Gynecological Cancer
http://www.cwhn.ca/gyn_cancer/index_gyn.html

Canadian Cancer Society
<http://www.cancer.ca>

Public Health Agency of Canada
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/chn-rcs/index-eng.php>

Canadian Partnership Against Cancer
<http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/>

The SOGC has developed a collection of information materials for women with menopause-related concerns, however your health-care provider remains the best front-line resource to answer your questions.

Visit www.menopauseandu.ca for more information about menopause and other women's health issues.