How to Deal with Itching During Menopause

by AFRA WILLMORE

Itching in Menopause

Is there anything more irritating than an itch, especially if you can't reach it or soothe it? Everyone knows the annoyance of that itchy foot in shoes you can't easily pop off, or at a time or place where it wouldn't be appropriate to frantically or even furtively scratch.

Unfortunately, itching is one of the lesser known side effects for some women in menopause, and one which can make life very uncomfortable.

What Causes Itching in Menopause?

As you enter the menopausal years, levels of the hormone estrogen begin to fluctuate and drop. Changing amounts of this hormone in your body is what causes many well-known menopause issues including the infamous hot flashes.

Estrogen is the culprit once again when it comes to itching, as decreasing levels of this hormone in perimenopause and menopause can affect your skin.

Along with many other roles in the body, estrogen is related to the production of collagen, an essential building block of skin. Collagen is a fiber which gives your skins its strength and elasticity. As well as causing itching, lower levels of collagen in the skin can cause wrinkles to develop.

Estrogen is also involved in the production of natural oils that keep your skin moisturized. The lack of collagen and natural oils can cause your skin to become thin and itchy.

Any area of your body can become itchy — if it has skin on it, it can itch. This includes the genital area, which can prove particularly embarrassing.

Some women find they develop issues with their vagina becoming dry, itchy and/or painful. Vaginal problems are also caused by the decreasing levels of estrogen in the body.

Home Treatments for Itchiness

Sometimes you can solve itchiness by simply drinking more water. Dehydrated skin is itchy skin, so cut back on caffeinated beverages including tea, coffee and colas, and make sure you drink plenty of water. Tap water is fine and it's OK to add a cordial if you aren't keen on the taste of plain water.

Skincare

Moisturizers are also a simple fix for dry and itchy skin. However, you may have found that as you enter

menopause, your usual body lotions and facial moisturizers are now irritating your skin.

Switch to non-perfumed lotions and face creams specially formulated for ageing or dry and sensitive skin. A basic aqueous cream is a good option to replace your body lotion. It's mild, cheap and easy to slather on after your bath or shower.

The sun can also cause skin to become inflamed, so use a good sun screen. You can buy these especially formulated for sensitive skin or choose a product made for babies and young children.

In the Bathroom

Changing your bathing routine can also be a big help in combating dry skin and itchiness.

Make sure your bath or shower water is not too hot, as this can strip the skin of essential natural oils. Avoid perfumed bath and shower products and choose those marked for dry and sensitive skin instead. Also, pat dry rather than rub briskly with a towel.

Always shower after swimming or using a hot tub containing chemicals.

Go Natural

Try wearing loose natural fabrics to avoid skin irritation. Clothes which cling can cause itching especially if they are made from man-made fabrics. Avoid wearing wool right next to your skin as well.

Medical Treatment for Itchiness

For especially severe itching there are medical treatments which can help skin or vaginal itching.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is one option, but unless itching is particularly bad this option might be a little over the top.

However, if you are experiencing other issues caused by declining estrogen levels like hot flashes, mood swings and issues with sleeping, HRT might be worth considering; it can solve many issues with just a daily tablet or patch. HRT is also available in topical gels, creams and pessaries, and as an implant.

If your skin itching is your main symptom there are also a few options available to you.

Antihistamine

You could try an antihistamine — the same sort of product you use for allergies like hay fever or pet allergies.

Antihistamine products are available in tablet form, including some where one tablet lasts all day. You can also get it in a cream form, which means you can apply it directly to the itchy area, as long as you haven't broken the skin by fierce scratching.

You can buy antihistamines over the counter at the drug store or even larger grocery stores. It might be wise to check with your doctor if you take medications or have a job where you drive or operate heavy machinery, as some antihistamines can make you drowsy.

Steroids

A mild steroid cream or lotion might help to soothe sore and itchy skin when applied directly to the irritated area.

Available over the counter or by prescription, mild topical steroid products contain a small amount (usually 1 or 2%) of hydrocortisone, which can help stop the itch.

Steroids however are usually a short-term treatment as they can cause skin thinning and blisters. So, if you need to continue using them after a week, see your doctor who may decide to prescribe a longer-term treatment.

For example, the itchy genital condition Lichen Sclerosis, which often manifests itself during perimenopause and menopause, is normally treated and then managed by the long-term application of steroids and moisturizers.

Anaesthetic Cream

You can buy anaesthetic creams which usually contain ingredients such as lidocaine, tetracaine, benzocaine or prilocaine, which can help stop the itch. However, they must not be used on irritated, visibly damaged or broken skin as they can make things worse. They must also only be used a very short-term solution.

If skin or genital itching persists, it’s important to consult a doctor as itching and skin changes can be caused by underlying health conditions, some of which could be serious.