

# Information Sheet:

## Breast Cancer Treatment & Menopausal Symptoms

You may experience menopausal symptoms due to the chemotherapy you are receiving.

Menopause refers to a woman's final menstrual period. Around two thirds of women younger than 50 years of age (when their breast cancer is diagnosed) will go through menopause because of their treatment.

It is possible that your periods will not return. The likelihood of early menopause, and the symptoms, will depend on your age and the type of chemotherapy you have.

### Menopausal symptoms may include:

- ❖ Irregular menstrual periods
- ❖ Hot flushes
- ❖ Night sweats
- ❖ Vaginal dryness
- ❖ Painful sexual intercourse
- ❖ Loss of libido
- ❖ Difficulty sleeping
- ❖ Difficulties with bladder control
- ❖ Tiredness and mood swings
- ❖ Skin and breasts becoming less supple and less firm
- ❖ Brittle bones, which means they are more likely to fracture in a fall.

### How can I manage my menopausal symptoms?

- ❖ Try to maintain an ideal body weight. Maintain a healthy low fat diet, including fresh fruit and vegetables, cereals and whole grains.
- ❖ Drink 6 to 8 glasses (about 2 litres) of water per day.
- ❖ Doing regular weight bearing exercises such as walking for at least 30 minutes, 2-3 times a week, and resistance training such as exercises with weights will help well-being and will enhance relaxation and sleep, as well as strengthen bones. Talk to a health professional before starting any new activity after treatment for breast cancer and build activities slowly.
- ❖ Decrease your caffeine intake, including cola drinks, coffee, chocolate and tea.

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- ❖ Alcoholic drinks should be limited to one standard drink per day, if you choose to drink.
- ❖ Include low fat dairy foods high in calcium in your diet.
- ❖ If you experience hot flushes, wear natural fibres such as cotton and dress in layers.
- ❖ Avoid Smoking
- ❖ Maintain a cool environment, by keeping a small fan nearby may be helpful especially when you are feeling hot. Sip water to cool you down. If your hot flushes are bothersome, speak to your doctor about medications that might be of use.
- ❖ Deep breathing and relaxation techniques may help with general well-being. Your nurse can help you with these.
- ❖ If you are experiencing sleep problems, try the following techniques to improve sleep:
  - Avoid caffeine, alcohol or other stimulants prior to sleep.
  - Use your bedroom for sleep and intimacy only - no reading or TV.
  - Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning.
  - If you need to have a "nap" during the day, try not to nap too late in the afternoon as this interferes with night time sleep.
  - Increase your physical activity during the day but avoid exercising close to bedtime.
  - Try listening to music, reading or using relaxation techniques 30 minutes before going to bed.
- ❖ If vaginal dryness or painful intercourse is a problem for you, you may like to try a vaginal lubricant. Please talk to your doctor or breast nurse about products that might be best for you.
- ❖ Keep a diary of bothersome symptoms to discuss with your health care professional.
- ❖ Be open with your partner about changes in your libido. Explore other ways of sharing intimacy, such as hugging, touching and massage.

**We encourage you to speak with your healthcare team if you have any concerns about your menopausal symptoms.**

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We welcome feedback at:

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**Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.**