

## Navigating menopause: Expert advice for symptom relief

The transition to menopause – when a person permanently stops having menstrual periods – can bring symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats, irregular periods and anxiety. Women may want to find assistance with these symptoms.

[Dennis Sands, MD](#), is an OSF HealthCare gynecologist and chief medical officer at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center in Alton, Illinois. He cautions you to be wary of over-the-counter medication that claims to help with all menopause symptoms.

"In general, a lot of the at-home remedies are marketed very well. They are touted as cure-alls or things that will work for the most common complaints, like hot flashes," Dr. Sands says. "What we've found is most of them don't work."

Dr. Sands adds that these medicines are marketed as dietary supplements, not pharmaceuticals. So, there's more wiggle room to make claims about their benefits. Dr. Sands says he's seen menopause medicine labels at the pharmacy that tout vitamin, soy or phytoestrogen ingredients. Equelle is a common brand name. Dr. Sands says these medicines can have a minor effect on menopause symptoms in healthy people, but they are not cure-alls or effective for all people. In particular, he says irregular bleeding usually requires a treatment plan laid out by a health care provider and an evaluation to rule out something more serious.

That's where your gynecologist comes in, with Dr. Sands reminding that treatment is different for everyone. The first advice you'll likely hear: keep up with your health.

"We've noticed that people who are healthy overall, exercise well, sleep well and are in good relationships generally do pretty well in the menopausal transition," Dr. Sands says. "The more stress people are under, the more they're not as healthy as they could be, the more their sleep is disturbed. It seems a lot of those people tend to have a more difficult transition."

Estrogen patches and progesterone creams can also help, especially in younger women. A provider may also see if other medications you're taking are making your menopause symptoms worse.

"If you're struggling, see your provider and review all the options," Dr. Sands suggests. "There are some great options that are effective and safe. Generally, they're only used for a short time to get people through the transition."