

Women Hormonal Side Effects

What are hormonal side effects?

- Hormonal side effects are caused by certain treatments that interfere with your body's typical production or use of hormones to prevent cancer cells from growing.
- Hormones control the activity of certain cells and organs as they move through the bloodstream. Any changes to your hormones will affect what the hormone controls and may cause specific side effects or changes to your body's functions.

What should I know about hormonal side effects?

- They are typically caused by hormone therapy (also called endocrine therapy) used to treat breast or certain types of uterine cancer.
- Common signs and symptoms of hormonal side effects are hot flashes, night sweats, irregular or absent menses, vaginal dryness, sexual dysfunction, mood changes, insomnia, weakened bones, muscle or joint pain or weakness, hair thinning, and fluid retention.

What puts me at risk of experiencing hormonal side effects?

- People respond differently to the same treatment, so not everyone gets the same side effects, and some side effects are gender specific.
- As you get older, it is normal for your body to go through hormonal changes, including menopause. Changes in your hormone levels may lead to hormonal side effects.
- Surgery that removes ovaries or testes, certain chemotherapy (such as cyclophosphamide), hormone therapy, and radiation treatment to the pelvis may increase your risk of experiencing hormonal side effects.

How are hormonal side effects identified/evaluated/diagnosed?

- Your care team may ask you to describe any changes you have seen with your body, such as hot flashes, weight gain or muscle pain.
- Many of these side effects cannot be tested for, so it is important to tell your care team how you are feeling and what symptoms you are experiencing.
- Your care team may recommend a bone density screening to check the strength of your bones.

What are the complications of hormonal side effects if my symptoms are not managed?

- Hormonal side effects can cause shortness of breath, sudden sweating, enlarged breast tissue, hair loss, and sexual dysfunction.
- In severe cases, hormonal side effects can cause osteoporosis, edema, and cardiovascular events (such as stroke or heart attack).

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What can I do to manage hormonal side effects?

- DO wear loose fitting, lightweight clothing made from natural fibers, and dress in layers.
- DO stay hydrated with cool liquids.
- DO carry a portable fan.
- DO include physical activity in your daily routine.
- AVOID tight hairstyles that pull your hair.
- AVOID standing for long periods of time.
- AVOID alcohol, caffeine, and foods that are spicy.
- AVOID smoking.

What can I do to treat or manage hormonal side effects at home?

- DO carry a personal hot flashes diary to record the number, frequency, severity, and timing of hot flashes so you can identify and avoid personal triggers that cause your hot flashes.
- DO keep a diary of your pain, including a description of when and where the pain is occurring, what it feels like, and how long it lasts.
- DO use vaginal moisturizers or lubricants.
- AVOID taking any new medication for hormonal side effects unless specified or prescribed by your care team.

What are additional recommendations for managing side effects?

Possible Side Effect

Management

Bone thinning

- Include plenty of calcium in your diet. Good sources of calcium include dairy products, almonds, broccoli, kale, canned salmon with bones and sardines.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine. Weight bearing activities such as walking, jogging and climbing stairs can help build strong bones and slow bone loss.
- Take a Calcium and Vit D supplement as recommended by your doctor.
- Do not smoke.
- Avoid drinking more than one alcoholic drink per day for women, 2 drinks/day for men.

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Possible Side Effect

Management

Muscle or joint pain or weakness

- Keep a diary of your pain, including a description of when and where the pain is occurring, what it feels like, and how long it lasts.
- Stay as active as possible but know that it is okay to rest as needed, too.
- Tell your care provider if pain interferes with your activity. If the pain or weakness bothers you, ask your provider how you may ease this discomfort.
- Take only pain medication that has been prescribed or recommended by your care provider.

Hair thinning

- Avoid hairstyles that pull on hair.
- Avoid high heat hair styling tools.
- Use a soft brush with natural fibers.
- For more information on hair loss refer to the “alopecia” supplemental side effect sheet.

Fluid retention

- Do not stand for long periods of time.
- Keep your legs elevated when sitting or lying down.
- Avoid eating salty foods, which can increase swelling.
- Avoid wearing tight-fitting clothing and shoes.
- Weigh yourself daily.
- Contact your care provider if you notice any of the following:
 - o Swelling in the hands, feet, or legs
 - o Shortness of breath
- Weight gain of five pounds or more in a week
- If you have swelling after you had lymph nodes removed you may experience lymphedema. Notify your doctor.

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What might my care team provide to help?

- Treatments for some hormonal side effects include pain-reducing medications, nonhormonal treatment for hot flashes, calcium supplements, and vitamin D supplements.
- Please speak with your care team before taking any new medications or supplements.

When should I call my care team?

- Call your care team or get emergency help if you experience shortness of breath from your usual daily activities.

How can I tell if my hormonal side effects are getting better?

- Most side effects will go away when your treatment ends, but other effects can remain for some time after your treatment has ended.
- Your care team will develop a follow-up care plan to address any of these issues.

What questions should I ask my care team about hormonal side effects?

- What side effects are common from the hormone therapy you are recommending for my cancer treatment?
- How likely is it that side effects occur and how long will they last?
- What can the healthcare team do to prevent or relieve side effects?
- Who do I contact if I begin experiencing hormonal side effects?
- Who do I contact if I have a question about specific side effects?
- Can you recommend a palliative and supportive care specialist for me to talk to about potential side effects?