Echo Advance
Community-Based and Health System Menopause Supports
Recommendations for Providers from Menopausal Women Living in Timmins

Recommendations from Community Women in Timmins

- Provide supportive communication, including on-line support groups and a menopause hotline.
- Make information accessible in doctors’ offices and health clinics (e.g., research, DVDs).
- Involve and educate families on what to expect during the menopausal transition.
- Offer educational clinics on menopause and ensure public health units are supportive of the aging population.
- Ensure menopause experts are available by educating health professionals and having experienced counsellors available to discuss menopause-related issues.

Background

In the Fall of 2011, Timmins Family Health Team and Echo: Improving Women’s Health in Ontario co-hosted an exciting event involving thirteen mid-life women in order to:

1. increase their awareness of and encourage reflection on current research-based best practices during menopause (see p. 3);
2. support them to articulate their preferences for community-based and health care supports given their knowledge of best practices and their knowledge of their community; and
3. share women’s preferred support options with service providers in the community.

This Echo Advance features the preferences for support and health care of women from Timmins women after learning and reflecting on best practices at the day-long event. This event was one of four similar events held throughout the province. These community engagement events are part of a larger initiative to support uptake of best practice guidelines related to menopause by women and primary health care providers across Ontario.

Midlife Women in Ontario

Approximately 35% of Ontario women are between 40 and 64 years of age. In these years, women experience a normal biological lifecycle event known as the menopausal transition, and they may also experience other factors related to aging (e.g., incontinence, osteoporosis). Women in the menopausal transition (i.e., perimenopause - the years during which women are still menstruating but periods are becoming more irregular) report symptoms such as headache, poor sleep, mood changes, vasomotor symptoms, and joint pain, although many women transition without major problems and may consider it a positive phase of their lives. Menopause, which officially begins

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1 In the Fall of 2011, Echo: Improving Women’s Health in Ontario partnered with Timmins Family Health Team, Bridges Community Health Centre, Windsor-Essex Community Health Centre, and Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton-Niagara. Echo Advances about each event are available at [www.echo-ontario.ca](http://www.echo-ontario.ca).
one year after the last menstrual period, is associated with an increased risk for several chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis\(^2,3\). Women are living post-menopause much longer than previous generations, many with disabilities, and are indicating a lack of effective services to address their needs during the peri-to post-menopausal transition\(^1,2,3\).

‘Healthy Menopause’

Following a discussion of best practices (see next page) for supporting menopausal women and being mindful of their community, participants said they wanted the following enhancements to be made available locally: 1) **supportive communication** through support groups, Facebook and a menopause hotline; 2) **accessible information** including literature and DVDs on issues related to menopause at doctor’s offices and health clinics, practical information such as recommended foods/drinks to alleviate menopause symptoms, and weekly articles in local newspapers or magazines written by a health care professional; 3) **involvement and education of families** through sessions on ‘how to talk about menopause with your family’, and education in schools; 4) **educational clinics** on menopause-related topics for women of all ages (including healthy lifestyle sessions) along with free products for the aging population (including free lubricant, incontinent pads, and vaginal cones); and 5) **menopause experts** available in the community (by educating doctors and other health care professionals on menopause, having shorter wait times in the doctor’s office for appointments, and having an experienced counsellor available to discuss menopausal health issues).

## Menopause Resources

**Consumer and Provider information about menopause** or mid-life can be found on the following websites to help support educational needs:

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**Midlife Health Issues**\(^2,3,4\)

### Vasomotor Symptoms (Hot Flashes)
- Symptoms can include sweating, irregular heartbeat, anxiety
- Can cause sleep problems

### Vaginal Atrophy/Sexual Health Changes
- Vaginal surface gets thinner, drier, less elastic, fewer secretions
- More frequent urinary tract infections
- Libido may change
- Sex may be difficult/painful

### Urinary Incontinence (leaking urine)
- Affects 10% of women by age 50
- Different kinds of incontinence (e.g., urge, stress)
- Risk factors: obesity, fluid intake, smoking, depression

### Osteoporosis/Bone Health
- Loss of bone strength
- Risk factors: age, prior fracture, smoking, alcohol intake

### Mood & Memory Issues
- Depression, moodiness, and irritability are common
- Loss of words, memory changes
- Risk factors: life stress, hot flashes, family history of depression, overweight

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Best Practices for Midlife Health Issues

Vasomotor Symptoms (Hot Flashes)
- Lifestyle changes (e.g., physical activity, reduce alcohol, quit smoking)
- Hormone therapies

Vaginal Atrophy/Sexual Health Changes
- Vaginal moisturizers and lubricants
- Regular intercourse or other approaches to sexual stimulation
- Cranberry-lingonberry juice (to protect against urinary tract infections)
- Vaginal estrogen therapies

Urinary Incontinence (leaking urine)
- Weight loss (if overweight)
- Regular physical activity
- Pelvic floor physiotherapy (e.g., Kegel exercises)
- Bladder schedule, medications

Osteoporosis/Bone Health
- Calcium intake (1500 mg/day)
- Vitamin D (800 IU/day)
- Hormone therapy
- Regular physical activity

Mood & Memory Issues
- Estrogen in perimenopausal women
- Psychotherapy
- Antidepressants

(1) The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (SOGC) has two websites - one on menopause and osteoporosis, and another on sexuality: [http://www.menopauseandu.ca/resources/index_e.aspx](http://www.menopauseandu.ca/resources/index_e.aspx); [http://www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca);

(2) SIGMA, the Canadian Menopause Society, has handouts available on its website as well, and many more are in development: [http://www.sigmamenopause.com](http://www.sigmamenopause.com);

(3) Decision-aid tools are helpful for supporting decision-making on health issues. The University of Ottawa is a leader in the development of tools, and has a searchable directory: [http://decisionaid.ohri.ca](http://decisionaid.ohri.ca);

(4) Women’s College Hospital’s health website has good information about many different health issues, including menopause: [http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/health-resources](http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/health-resources);

(5) The North American Menopause Society has menopause information plus statements regarding best practices: [http://www.menopause.org](http://www.menopause.org);

(6) The Cleveland Clinic is a U.S.-based website with reputable information about menopause and women’s health issues. [http://my.clevelandclinic.org/disorders/ menopause/hlc_menopause Basics.aspx](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/disorders/ menopause/hlc_menopause Basics.aspx);

(7) The National Institutes of Health, also U.S.-based, have good websites for women’s health. This one is about alternative and complementary medicine: [http://nccam.nih.gov/health/menopause](http://nccam.nih.gov/health/menopause);

(8) The Canadian Continence Foundation is a consumer-focused organization on continence issues: [http://www.canadiancontinence.ca](http://www.canadiancontinence.ca);

(9) Information and position statements about the use of bioidentical hormones can be found on the SOGC and NAMS website listed above. New research is being conducted in the U.S. as well as Europe. For information about the U.S. clinical trials, please go to the clinical trials website and use the search term ‘bioidentical’: [http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?term=bioidentical](http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?term=bioidentical). For
information about the European prospective trial that is examining cancer risk factors in a large cohort of women, please see http://epic.iarc.fr/centers/france.php.

Echo appreciates the opportunity to work with community partners and community women to advance women’s health in Ontario. For more information, please contact Simone Kaptein by email at skaptein@echo-ontario.ca or by phone at (416) 597-9687 Ext. 235.

References

About Echo: Improving Women’s Health in Ontario
Echo is an agency of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Our vision is improved health and well-being and reduced health inequities for Ontario women. For more information, please see www.echo-ontario.ca.

About the Timmins Family Health Team (Timmins FHT)
The Timmins FHT is a neighbourhood team of health professionals providing a full range of primary health care to the residents of Timmins, Ontario. The Timmins FHT includes doctors, nurse practitioners, nurse specialists, pharmacists, dieticians, health promoters and social workers. For more information, please see http://www.timminsfht.ca/index.php