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Ospemifene May Ease Menopause Symptoms Beyond Painful Intercourse

If you're a woman past menopause, your doctor might have told you about ospemifene, a drug used to treat painful intercourse. Marketed under the name Osphena in North America, recent research suggests that this medication might help with other menopausal symptoms, too. Let's take a closer look.

Vaginal changes at menopause

For many women, declines in estrogen at menopause bring about changes to the vagina. Estrogen is an important hormone for vaginal health. It keeps vaginal tissue moist and flexible. But when levels drop, vaginal tissue can become dry and brittle, making sex uncomfortable or even painful. The vagina can also become shorter and narrower.

Unfortunately, these symptoms usually don't improve on their own. Some women try over-the-counter lubricants and moisturizers to make sex more comfortable. Hormone therapy is another option, although estrogen products are not appropriate for all women.

What is ospemifene?

Ospemifene was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2013. Specifically, it was approved to treat moderate to severe dyspareunia – painful sex. An alternative to estrogen, ospemifene works to keep vaginal tissue healthy and elastic.

Can ospemifene be used to treat other menopausal symptoms?

At the 2014 annual meeting of the North American Menopause Society, Dr. Ginger Constantine of EndoRheum Consultants presented new research on ospemifene. The results suggest that ospemifene might relieve other menopausal symptoms beyond painful intercourse.

In the study, some women reported that symptoms like vaginal dryness, itching, and irritation improved because of ospemifene. The drug also relieved difficult and painful urination and vaginal bleeding during sex in some patients.

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It's important to note that the drug is still FDA-approved for moderate to severe dyspareunia. It's possible that future research may explore ospemifene's role in relieving other symptoms and that the FDA may revise the drug's label. For now, doctors who prescribe ospemifene for symptoms other than dyspareunia are doing so "off-label" at their own discretion.

How might ospemifene affect the endometrium?

One of the biggest concerns about ospemifene is its potential effects on the endometrium – the lining of the uterus.

Before menopause, a woman's endometrium thickens once a month, in case she becomes pregnant. If there is no pregnancy, the endometrium "sheds" when she has her menstrual period.

After menopause, this no longer happens. However, there have been cases in which ospemifene causes the endometrium to thicken anyway. With this in mind, women taking ospemifene should see a doctor if they notice any unusual bleeding.

Ospemifene may also raise a woman's risk for blood clots and strokes.

Learn More

If you think ospemifene is worth a try, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she can guide you on the best treatment options for your personal situation.

And if you'd like to learn more about sex and aging for women, these links may help:

[Sex and Midlife Women](#)

[Sex Health and Aging for Women](#)

[Sex For Women After 50](#)

You can also find a number of other links related to female sexual health [here](#).

Resources

Medscape Medical News

Tucker, Miriam

"Despite Label, Ospemifene Eases Multiple Menopause Symptoms"

(November 4, 2014)

<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/834313>

Sexual Medicine Society of North America

“Ospemifene for Vulvar and Vaginal Atrophy”

(Post for healthcare providers)

<http://www.sexhealthmatters.org/for-healthcare-providers/ospemifene-for-vulvar-and-vaginal-atrophy>