

chapter

11

How to Choose and Work with the Perfect Medical Provider

DO YOU WONDER HOW YOU CAN FIND a knowledgeable and caring medical provider who has an interest in your menopause? One of the most important people in the successful management of your menopause is the right medical care provider, one who can answer your questions and can help you find safe and effective solutions to your unique menopause.

The perfect menopause practitioner is caring, has the knowledge, training, experience, and the interest and time to offer you all the up-to-date options. The right practitioner can make the difference between having an average (or worse, miserable) menopause and making these years the best of your life.

THE BEST PRACTITIONER CHOICES

Your practitioner choice could be a physician or nurse practitioner and will most likely be trained in the area of OB/GYN, internal medicine, or family

practice. Look for someone special. Remember, most doctors (even OB/GYNs) weren't rigorously trained about menopause. Even in the best OB/GYN residencies, menopause gets little formal attention, and many medical practices are simply too busy in today's HMO style of practice to pay proper attention to your menopause needs if it is not their special interest.

The good news is that times are changing. As more women reach the menopause age, more health care practitioners are becoming interested in menopause and menopause therapies. More and more practitioners are acquiring special knowledge and training to become experts in understanding and treating menopause. The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is the largest national medical Society dedicated to menopause research and education. This highly respected organization credentials practitioners as menopause experts when they have met certain educational expectations, including special training and passing special exams in menopause management.

Menopause is your special time in life. Look for someone special: one who knows all the options and is open to them.

HOW TO FIND YOUR SPECIAL PRACTITIONER

Is someone special caring for you now? If it is your OB/GYN, are you getting enough attention? Your OB/GYN may be the perfect provider, but just may not be aware that you're interested in more time to discuss menopause options. Maybe your OB/GYN doesn't have the time or specific interest, but is willing to refer you to someone else in the practice or in the community who does have an interest and expertise in menopause.

Ask people in your community to find out who are the menopause experts. Look to your friends for some information. They may know or have had an experience with someone they have found very helpful. Your internist or family practitioner is a good resource also. And be sure to consult your pharmacist. She or he may know a great practitioner with a special interest in menopause. Also, consider making inquiries at the local medical society, with friends who are in the medical profession, at hospitals, medical centers and local medical schools.

As a few names filter out, first check their credibility online or check with friends who may have some input on the specific individuals. The North American Menopause Society is one place you will want to check for credentials. You can find a lot of up-to-date and accurate information in the consumer section of their website, where they manage a list of doctors and other health care practitioners who belong to this Society. The website can be found at: <http://www.menopause.org/consumers/>.

MAXIMIZE YOUR MEETING: THE PERFECT APPOINTMENT

Once you've made an appointment with the menopause practitioner, I strongly recommend that you carefully **prepare for this visit**. You are looking for a menopause practitioner who will spend the necessary time with you, and you will want to maximize this time. Advanced preparation will allow you to use your allotted time efficiently and effectively. I recommend the same preparation for each additional visit.

Ask that your first visit be a consultation, and ask the office staff how long it will last. At your first visit, I recommend covering these three agenda items:

1. Give the provider information about who you are, why you are there, and what specific interests you have.
2. Learn about the provider, the provider's knowledge, special training, interest and philosophies regarding menopause and menopause therapies, especially as it relates to you.
3. Learn how the practice works in relationship to your needs. Is the provider and practice the right one for you?

WHO YOU ARE!

The very first thing you want to do at your first visit is provide accurate, detailed information quickly and efficiently about who you are and why you

are looking for a new provider. **Writing this information down beforehand, in a clear, concise, and brief manner, will help you focus and communicate your issues, questions and needs quickly and concisely.** Figure 11–1 contains a brief form that will help you summarize all of this information. Copy it, fill it out, and give a copy to the provider. This will save valuable time, and allow more time to be spent on important answers to your questions and counseling.

I also recommend that you document your visits and keep your notes organized. Keep a copy of the completed form and your personal notes from the visit in your new folder labeled with your practitioner’s name on it.

Also at your first visit, let the practitioner know your philosophies about menopause, and what your initial thinking is about treatment options. (You

Figure 11–1

Simple Form For Your Practitioner

Fill out this form and give it to your new practitioner as a quick outline of your medical history.

NAME: _____ AGE: _____

Problem(s): (Why I came here) _____
(Be concise) _____

Medications: _____

Vitamins/Supplements: _____

I have had the following:

When:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Mammogram | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | DEXA Bone Density | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Colonoscopy | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Cholesterol Testing | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Hormone Testing | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Other Special Tests | _____ |

should have a few ideas now that you have read *The Perfect Menopause: 7 Steps to the Best Time of Your Life*. Acknowledge that you are open minded and looking for options. For example, “I was hoping to do this more naturally,” or, “I was hoping to start on hormones.” This will let the provider know the starting point. Write down the reasons for your visit in advance to help you prepare and focus better at the visit.

It is also very helpful if you let the provider know what you have been reading and hearing about. Not everything that is written is absolutely true or scientifically accurate. Some therapies may not be appropriate for you. Don't forget that our understanding and knowledge about menopause and menopause therapies are rapidly changing. Be sure to keep an open mind about your options for management, because as Professor Einstein said, “The answers have changed!”

LEARN ABOUT THE PROVIDER

Your second agenda point is to learn about the provider and to get specific feedback about how she/he can help you make menopause the best time of your life. You probably already know the practitioner's medical credentials but if you don't, ask! Ask about general and specific medical training, and with which hospital(s) she/he is affiliated. Find out who covers emergency calls when she/he is away or “not on call.”

With regard to menopause, I recommend that you consider some or all of the following questions:

1. Do you have a special interest in menopause? What percent of your patients are in menopause and perimenopause?
2. Do you have special training or an expertise in the area of menopause? Where did you do your training?
3. Do you believe in, and treat patients when appropriate, with:
 - a. Hormone therapies?
 - b. Herbal therapies?
 - c. Other natural therapies such as acupuncture, meditation, chiropractic, and hypnosis?

4. Are you open-minded with regard to working with other natural therapists such as naturopaths, herbalists, acupuncturists, and chiropractors?
5. Do you measure and evaluate hormone levels (serum and/or salivary), bone densities, cholesterol levels, mammograms, and colonoscopies as part of management?
6. Are you familiar with bioidentical hormones? Do you use them in your practice? Why or why not?
7. Do you recommend compounding pharmacies, pharmaceuticals, or both as sources for therapies?
8. Do you actively manage patients for sexual dysfunction? Mood dysfunction? Weight management? Cognitive dysfunction? Insomnia?
9. How would you begin to coach me about my menopause?
10. What would be the time frame to achieve this/these goals?
11. Where do we go from here?

IS THE PROVIDER RIGHT FOR YOU?

After the first visit, you should be able to decide if the provider is right for you and your situation. If this is not the right provider for you, move on to your next option. Don't waste time. If this is the right situation, begin to build a solid relationship with the provider. Find out how the practice works, so that you can communicate effectively with your practitioner, and follow-up as frequently as recommended. You will be on your way to making the menopause years the best years of your life.

INSIDER TIPS TO MORE EFFECTIVE OFFICE VISITS

Even with the perfect menopause provider and a great start, achieving The Perfect Menopause requires continuing forward momentum. Make each visit to your practitioner effective and productive using these five tips:

1. **Take notes.** Bring a pad and pen to take notes, especially at consultations. Even if you write down only a few things, you can review them

when you get home and you will recall the issues more clearly. Don't waste the opportunity to put all the good advice from your visit into action. **You won't get results unless you take action.**

2. **Keep a menopause journal.** Journaling is a very effective way to help you take action. Daily entries would be best, but even weekly entries will help you reflect on your menopause issues, and monitor your progress. Write down what you plan to do in order to tackle your sleep dysfunction, weight gain, hot flashes, mood swings, sexual issues, or anything else you want to start changing, and keep a log of your provider's recommendations. Make notations about how many hot flashes you had that day, how you are feeling about your significant other, and anything else that will help you monitor your progress. Figure 11-3 is an example of a typical journal form for menopause. Bring your menopause journal or a summary of it with you to your office visits. And write down your questions in advance too, so you won't forget (Figure 11-2).
3. **Turn off your cell phone.** Nothing is more distracting (yet surprisingly common) as a patient, in the middle of a consultation with the practitioner, to get a cell phone call and even worse, actually answer it. Don't break the concentration! First impressions are very important for you as well as the practitioner. Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you want to get the most out of your consultation, be sure to respect the time and efforts of the practitioner. Build the partnership you want and maintain it in the best possible manner.
4. **Ask for recommended reading.** Ask the practitioner for references and reading recommendations. Read good, balanced literature and be open-minded about, yet critical of, the validity of what is being presented. Be aware that there is a great deal written about menopause and menopause therapy, and not all of it is accurate, balanced, or medically sound.
5. **Manage your insurance coverage.** Don't make payment for your consultations and visits an issue. As best as you are able, determine **in advance** what insurance(s) the provider participates in, what your insurance covers, and what your out-of-pocket responsibility will be. A busy menopause practitioner wants to take care of your medical issues, not spend considerable time collecting payments or figuring out your insurance. This is a frequent issue and big headache in many office

practices today. Don't let payments or insurance issues dilute an otherwise outstanding provider-patient relationship.

Take every opportunity to attain The Perfect Menopause, and make these the best years of your life. A big part of this will be finding the right menopause practitioner, and then working to establish an effective and ongoing relationship with that provider.

