

# Good Health

A publication from **MEDSTAR GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL**

SUMMER 2016 [MedStarGoodSam.org/GoodHealth](http://MedStarGoodSam.org/GoodHealth)

## Keep Your Cool With Red Hot Mamas<sup>®</sup>

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# KEEP YOUR COOL WITH **RED HOT MAMAS**<sup>®</sup>

## Getting Support During Menopause Makes It a Breeze



Meals on Wheels volunteer Christine Fields hasn't let age slow her down. Red Hot Mamas<sup>®</sup> gave tips to help her stay active and eat healthier.

If you're a woman in your mid 40s to mid 50s and experience one or more of the following symptoms—irregular periods, intermittent hot flashes, forgetfulness, diminished libido, or sleep problems—you may be experiencing menopause.



**Michelle Germain, MD, FACOG**

"Menopause, defined as going a year without a period, is a natural stage that occurs when your body produces less estrogen and progesterone," explains Michelle Germain, MD, FACOG, chief of the Division of Gynecology, director of Women's Health Services, and director of Urogynecology at MedStar Good Samaritan Hospital and MedStar Union Memorial Hospital.

"Estrogen used to be called the 'umbrella hormone' because it affects so many parts of a woman's body," she notes. "Fluctuating estrogen levels and levels of follicle stimulating hormones (FSH) from the pituitary gland cause the hot flashes that many women experience during this time."

### Red Hot Mamas® to the Rescue

A great way to keep your cool during this time of transition is to have fun, share your experiences with other women and get the latest medical information at Red Hot Mamas®, a free menopause education series sponsored by MedStar Good Samaritan Hospital. The national chapter of Red Hot Mamas® was founded by Baltimore native Karen Giblin in 1991 after she learned that women undergoing menopause got conflicting information and little support. Red Hot Mamas® is the perfect recipe for leading a full life during menopause.

Baltimore resident Christine Fields credits the education she received at Red Hot Mamas® with helping her to lose 13 pounds. At age 73, she's past menopause but she learned about the importance of exercise and eating right for women of any age. She also shared information about managing menopause with her 52-year-old daughter.

She recalls, "I stopped eating processed foods and juices, and started eating more fruits and vegetables.

I also drink lots of water and exercise at least three days a week. I couldn't believe how fast the weight came off! My eating habits have really changed."

Fields, who keeps busy volunteering for a Meals on Wheels program and acting as a 'chauffeur' for many friends and neighbors who don't drive, heard about Red Hot Mamas® through Senior Network of North Baltimore, one of MedStar Good Samaritan's community partners.

### Great Advice and Healthy Activities

"Red Hot Mamas® is an excellent resource for women to understand the latest information about what's going on in their bodies as they age," Dr. Germain observes. "Menopause doesn't have to be a downer. Embrace it and enjoy the journey in this new stage of your life."

Deborah Bena, MA, RN, community education and health ministries coordinator who oversees Red



**Deborah Bena, MA, RN**

Hot Mamas® at MedStar Good Samaritan, says, "Normally, we hold about six events each year, although this spring we held one major event that offered screenings along with tons of great healthcare advice. We've offered everything from medical treatment options to diet, exercise, acupuncture, yoga, and zumba."

She continues, "We're lucky that Karen Giblin herself, who's such a dynamic presenter, often comes back to speak. All of the information in the program is well researched and women have a chance to mingle as well as listen to a speaker, ask questions and even get in some exercises or breakout sessions with tai chi or massages. We often have 50 to 100 women attending."

One Red Hot Mamas® session offered strategies to cope with overactive bladder, a common problem during menopause, while other sessions have taught stress reduction techniques or discussed how to manage being in the 'sandwich generation'.

### Coping with Hot Flashes

Another regular Red Hot Mamas® participant was Maria Montenegro, a Lutherville resident who recalls,



Christine helps to pack up meals for home-bound elderly.

"I saw my mother suffer through terrible hot flashes and mood changes and knew I didn't want that. I didn't have hot flashes myself but I shared the information I learned at Red Hot Mamas® with others and it helped them a lot."

Montenegro adds, "I learned a great deal. One woman was sweating but laughing and continuing like nothing was happening. She accepted that menopause was something normal and that it doesn't have to stop her from living a full life. To see that others have worse problems than you—and are dealing with it—gives you hope that you can handle it."

"Our participants tell us that the program has made a huge difference in their lives," states Bena. "One woman said that it had turned the corner for her—she started exercising for the first time in her life and felt less dependent and more energized."

Although menopause is a normal stage that all women go through, it can be uncomfortable and can increase your concerns about cardiovascular disease, bone loss and other disorders. Getting regular screenings, including a pelvic exam, pap smear, breast exam, mammogram, and bone density test, can help you detect problems early, when they are easier to treat.

### More Treatment Options

The good news is that there are far more treatment options today than were available in the past. Dr. Germain comments, "Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) works, but women may also benefit from antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications."

She adds, "I tell women what their options are and may recommend HRT if they don't have risk factors. I recommend that they take the lowest dose for the shortest time possible, and re-evaluate their needs periodically with their primary care doctor. If you're experiencing mood swings, know that these are common and don't be afraid to ask your doctor for medication."

### Alternative Approaches

"Evidence-based medicine supports cognitive behavioral therapies, and weight loss may

have benefit, but there is as yet no evidence to support exercise, yoga or diet as a way to control menopause symptoms," Dr. Germain cautions. "Women can try these approaches but they should be mindful that there is no quick fix."

She continues, "Research studies have not demonstrated that herbal remedies are effective, although there is a new Swedish flower pollen extract that has anecdotal benefits. I offer it if patients really don't want other treatments. It has no side effects but can be costly."

Montenegro was pleased to find that some simple lifestyle changes can ease the symptoms. "At Red Hot Mamas®, we learned that wearing light clothing at night, wearing layers, avoiding coffee, drinking alcohol in moderation, and getting plenty of exercise really help."

Dr. Germain notes that a common misperception among women is that hot flashes disappear. "They do lessen but may not go away," she observes. "After menopause, women continue to have hormonal surges, but eventually they may not perceive them."

**Visit [MedStarGoodSam.org/GoodHealth](http://MedStarGoodSam.org/GoodHealth) or call 855-546-1995 to register for Red Hot Mamas®, for a free tote bag and to hear first hand how cool menopause can be.**