



## Coping with menopausal symptoms: An internet survey of Belgian postmenopausal women

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** An internet survey was performed to obtain data on the current use in Belgium of hormone replacement therapy and alternative treatments for the alleviation of menopausal symptoms. A supplementary aim was to assess the use of opt-in internet opinion panels (TalkToChange, <http://www.talktochange.com>, and GMI, <http://www.gmi-mr.com/global-panel>) as a potential new way to obtain data on menopausal issues.

**Study design:** Data were collected via an internet platform from 696 postmenopausal women aged 45–60 years.

**Outcome measures:** Respondents were asked questions about their socio-demographic profile, their experience of the menopause, the burden of the menopause, its impact on their quality of life and the treatment of menopausal symptoms (if any).

**Results:** The opt-in internet opinion panels proved a quick way (19 days) to obtain reliable information with a low error margin (3.7%). The online survey collected detailed socio-demographic data. Almost all of the women (98%) had heard about the menopause before. Sixty-one percent perceived the menopause as a temporary phase (17% thought it lasted for one or two years and 44% thought it lasted for three to five years) and only 39% realized the menopause would last for the rest of their life. Twenty-three percent of the women reported any kind of impact of the menopause on their quality of life. However, for the other 77% the menopause had resulted in complaints. No differences according to the women's age, level of education or professional status were found in this respect. Sixty-nine percent of the women had 'ever' used some type of treatment for menopausal symptoms and 53% were currently using a treatment. Forty percent of those with more than three symptoms were currently untreated. Of those who were not on hormone replacement therapy (HRT), 61% would not consider taking it (54% were 'strongly opposed' and 7% simply 'opposed'), while 8% would consider asking their doctor for HRT. Among those women who were opposed to HRT, 25% indicated that they were afraid of the increased risk of breast cancer, 34% cited cardiovascular risks and 26% were worried about weight gain. In this Belgian sample, HRT was used significantly more often by French-speaking women (32%) than by Dutch-speaking women (9%) (OR 4.4,  $p < 0.0001$ ). The alternatives to HRT had a high satisfaction rate among users. Relaxation techniques, regular physical activity, acupuncture and avoiding stress had satisfaction rates similar to that with HRT. It was not possible to compare the alternatives in the same women. Nor was it possible to assess whether more pronounced symptoms required a specific treatment.

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