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“I think it’s menopause...but could it be aging?” Results of a NAMS Consumer Survey

CLEVELAND, Ohio (September 24, 2008)—More than 2,000 women responded to a consumer survey, “I think it’s menopause...but could it be aging?” that was developed and distributed by The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) through its free monthly e-newsletter, *Menopause Flashes*.

The results will be released in Orlando, Florida, during the NAMS 19th Annual Scientific Meeting. The theme of the meeting this year is “Is It Menopause or Is It Aging?”

“The survey addressed an issue that is a challenge to healthcare providers and researchers with regard to many conditions and diseases,” explained Wulf H. Utian, MD, PhD, DSc(Med), NAMS Executive Director. “It’s difficult to tease apart what symptoms and health risks are associated to the condition/disease or are simply part of the aging process. Frankly, it’s not all or none with regard to just about anything.”

The results of the survey revealed that an overwhelming majority of respondents (91.3%) know the correct definition of menopause, although only 62.4% have reached menopause themselves. The survey then asked if menopause or aging was the most likely cause of various symptoms and risks. Responses were as follows:

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- Almost all respondents consider menopause to be the cause of night sweats (99.4%), which is often true, although other conditions (eg, thyroid disease) can cause these troubling symptoms.
- Mood swings were identified by 96.5% as caused by menopause, and this can possibly be true.
- Although a majority believe that menopause caused vaginal dryness (84.3%) and unusual hair loss or growth (76.9%), these conditions are associated with both menopause and aging.
- Respondents believe that aging is the most likely cause for urinary urge incontinence (74.2%), whereas menopause is the more likely cause.
- They believe that aging is also the most likely cause for urinary stress incontinence (72.6%); both menopause and aging contribute to this condition, age more than menopause.
- A majority (59.9%) believe that menopause is responsible for weight gain, whereas both menopause and aging are the cause.
- Slightly more than half (51.3%) believe forgetfulness is caused by menopause, when aging is the more likely cause.
- Less than half (44.9%) believe menopause is responsible for weak bones; both aging and menopause contribute to increased osteoporosis risk.
- Over half (52.5%) of respondents believe age is a greater risk factor for breast cancer than menopause. They are correct. Menopause is not considered a risk factor for breast cancer.
- Over three fourths (78.3%) of respondents erroneously believe that hormone therapy is a greater risk factor for breast cancer than aging.

“This survey has identified many important issues,” said Dr. Utian. “It is difficult to tease apart the effects of aging from the effects of menopause, meaning that there is an urgent need to fund and support research to find more conclusive answers. In addition, women need more education

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about menopause so they can make informed health decisions at menopause and beyond. NAMS plays a big part in this educational mission.”

Reliable facts can be found at the Society’s Web site (www.menopause.org). The most current research on the subject will be presented by national and international experts at the NAMS Annual Scientific Meeting.

The Mission of NAMS, a nonprofit scientific organization, is to promote the health and quality of life of women through an understanding of menopause. The Society’s membership of 2,000 professionals representing a variety of disciplines—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, pharmacy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and complementary/alternative medicine—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause. (www.menopause.org)

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