

To Sleep. . .to Dream—

Decreasing Night Sweats is Key to Perimenopausal Well-Being

In this series of blog posts related to the “Peri-P” study, we have so far discussed who participants in the Progesterone for the Perimenopausal Hot Flushes and Night Sweats study are and where you live, plus briefly what the overall study showed. Last time we talked about the difficulty of getting enough women for a study when you don’t, ahead of time, understand how variable perimenopausal hot flushes and night sweats really are.

Today we’ll be discussing what I think are the most important results of this study: that progesterone significantly improved night sweats.

Recalling my own very difficult perimenopause, I remember waking suddenly in the middle of the night feeling wired, sweaty and too uncomfortable/activated to easily again fall asleep. The key thing participants in this study almost universally shared was *waking at least two nights a week with night sweats*. This was reported by 94% overall and by 100% of the women in what we called “early perimenopause” who had not skipped a period. That was also the most common the way you became eligible to be randomized. Showing the importance of night sweats in perimenopause may be one of the most important contributions of our study.

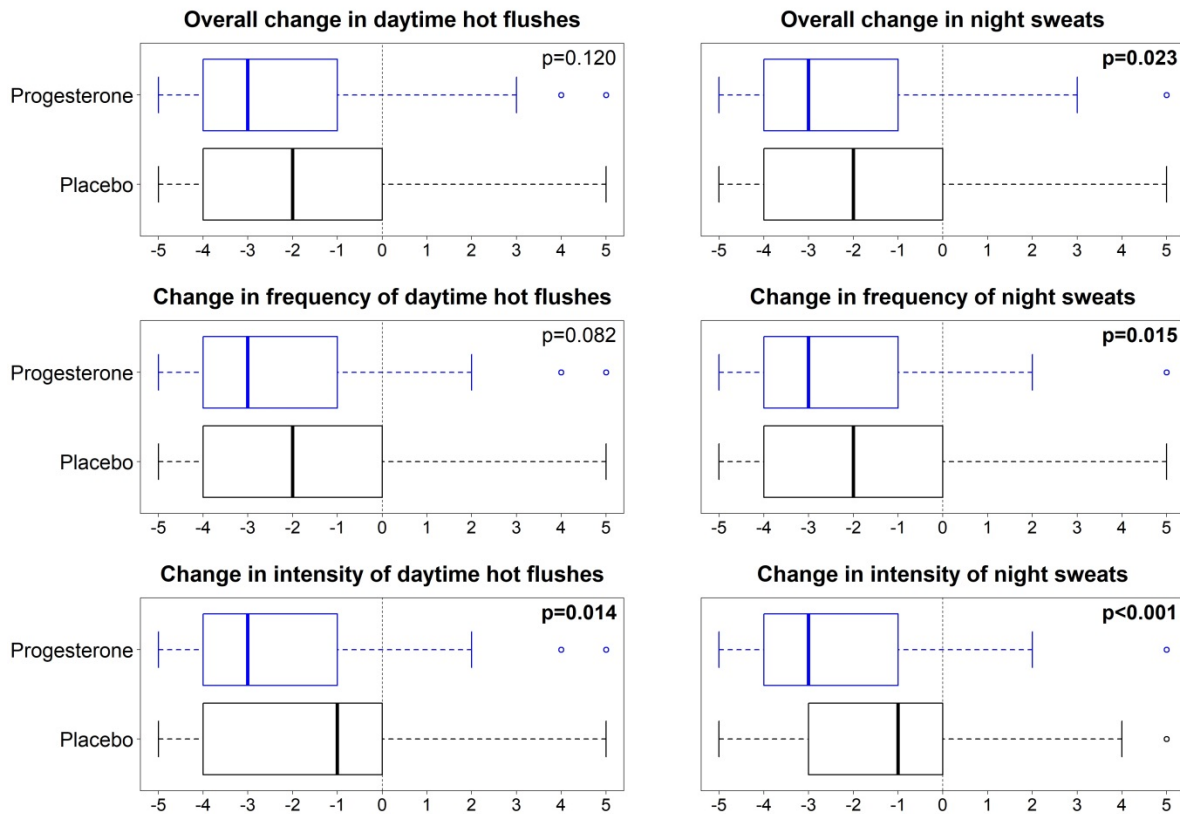
What is amazing is that *night sweats are not included* on many of the hot flush (or “flash” as they say in the USA) and “menopause” questionnaires that studies use to document vasomotor symptoms (meaning both day and night flushes). The only two questionnaires to assess vasomotor symptoms that include night sweats as well as daytime hot flushes are the Canadian-made Menopause-Specific Quality of Life Scale (MenQoL)¹ and the Greene Climacteric Scale². Neither of these, however, makes a distinction between women in perimenopause and in menopause.

That is important because heavy flow, “mood swings”, breast tenderness, increased cramps and fluid retention only occur for perimenopausal and not for menopausal women. (The only exception I know is if the menopausal women are taking estrogen therapy.)

So what did our study find about sleep and night sweats?

- Almost all participants (as mentioned) experienced important night sweats that awakened them at least twice a week.

- In all women, progesterone-treated participants' perceived that their overall night sweats decreased significantly more than placebo-treated ones.
- In all women, those treated with progesterone versus placebo felt that the sweatiness of their daytime and night sweats decreased significantly more.



- Women in early perimenopause who were on progesterone rather than placebo believed that their overall night sweats decreased significantly more; plus daytime sweatiness was also more decreased.
- Women in later perimenopause who had skipped a period and were on progesterone felt that their night sweats (and nearly their daytime sweatiness) decreased significantly more than if they were on placebo.

We also asked you about sleep problems in the diary or calendar as well as your perception of changes in sleep quality. The daily record showed no significant change although the results were tending to improve more on progesterone. However, the final questionnaire when you reported the changes in your "sleep quality" showed that those on progesterone had significantly greater improvement.

Therefore, the study progesterone for perimenopausal hot flushes and night sweats you made possible showed that most of you had problems with nighttime wakening

due to night sweats. The good news is that you perceived significant improvements in both night sweats and in sleep if you were treated with progesterone.

(Our next discussion will talk about the unwanted things [or side effects] you reported during the study and how they balanced out between the progesterone and the placebo groups).

Reference List

- (1) Hilditch JR, Lewis J, Peter A, van Maris B, Ross A, Franssen E et al. A menopause-specific quality of life questionnaire: development and psychometric properties. *Maturitas* 1996; 24:161-175.
- (2) Greene JG. Constructing a standard climacteric scale. *Maturitas* 1998; 29(1):25-31.