

# Mother looks for answers over son's drug use



**Catherine Murtagh-Schaffer**  
Guest Columnist  
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

**Dear Miss Cathy:** I know you must have heard this story a thousand times but I'm writing because I just found out that my son is a heroin user. I just found out that my baby boy is a drug addict who is injecting himself with poison. I can't even begin to tell you how distraught, confused, angry and emotional I am right now. What did I do wrong? What is wrong with him? How do I help him? Is he high as I write this letter? Is the phone ringing to tell me he has died of an overdose? Or is it the cops calling to tell me he's been arrested? I go from being scared to death to being an angry mamma bear. I want to pick up my "baby boy" and rock him in my arms, tell him it's going to be alright and protect him from this evil.

He is upset that I have discovered his secret and tells me "it's no big deal," he can stop whenever he wants to. You and I both know that's not true. I read your articles all the time. Please tell me what to do, I can't bear the thought of losing him.

– *Scared to Death*

**Dear Scared:** Your emotions are palpable in your letter and as a mom of a "baby boy" (who is now 37 years old), my heart is aching for you. Your story is like the 100 other stories I hear from mothers who are shocked when they discover their child is using. It is so like us mothers to blame ourselves when our children deviate from a healthy path. But don't do it, finding blame never solved a problem.

Living in fear of what seems like an inevitable phone call will make you crazy. You have to find some way to deal



**Mothers will blame themselves when their child deviates from a healthy path. But don't do it: Finding blame never solved this problem.** GETTY IMAGES

with that. I am always in favor of attending a NarcAnon meeting where you can learn coping techniques from others like yourself. You will also share disappointments, resources, wins, losses and tears. Here you learn to let go of what you can't control and the anger that you feel.

As for your son, he really can't just stop using. His brain chemistry has been altered. He is living with compulsive dependence on his drug of choice

and will do just about anything to avoid withdrawals. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) defines addiction as a chronic neurobiological disease. Without appropriate therapy, which includes medication and counseling, he will not be able to stop. However, treatment will not be effective unless he makes the decision himself to seek care.

I know how deeply you are hurting –

it's so difficult to watch your child engage in activities that you know will only lead them to harm. My prayers are for you and your son. I hope you can find some peace.

*Catherine Murtagh-Schaffer is a physician assistant at Lee Health. She is the Program Coordinator for the Opioid Use Disorder project. Send questions to dear-misscathyl@gmail.com; Lee Health Addiction Medicine Clinic 239-343-9190.*

# Alleviate menopause symptoms with hormone replacement



**Dr. Carol L. Roberts**  
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They say nothing in this world is certain, except death and taxes.

For women, I'd like to add a third item to the list – menopause.

At some point, women's bodies begin to produce less estrogen and progesterone, hormones that regulate body functions, preserve bone strength and regulate food intake, body weight, cholesterol production, glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity. A reduction in those valuable hormones puts women at a greater risk for degenerative diseases, disabilities and even various types of cancers.

Menopausal women commonly experience hot flashes, mood swings, weight gain, sleep disorders, anxiety, irritability, fatigue, decreased sexual desire and other symptoms. Although some women report very few changes after entering menopause, they're the lucky ones. Symptoms of menopause can become severe to the point that they

impact personal relationships, daily activities and even work.

About 50 percent of female patients who visit Naples Center for Functional Medicine are there for assistance to help address menopause-related concerns. Rather than take prescription drugs or over-the-counter medications to alleviate symptoms, they want a natural solution to a naturally occurring biological change.

As recently as a decade ago, hormone replacement therapy was still being questioned by some in the medical research community, as well as potential patients. Is it safe? What are the side effects? Is it right for me?

The bio-identical hormones being offered to our patients, however, are chemically identical to those produced by a premenopausal woman. In fact, they're proven safer than pharmaceutical hormones that can actually increase risks of complications. That's why nearly every one of my patients seeking to alleviate symptoms of menopause turns to hormone replacement therapy.

Before women proceed with hormone replacement therapy, they should have a lengthy consultation with a

knowledgeable physician and undergo thorough diagnostic testing. Whether or not the patient opts for hormone replacement therapy, many of our patients also commit to making healthier lifestyle choices like increasing physical activity, maintaining a healthy diet and managing stress. No two women are the same, so their health care road map should not be the same, either.

What often surprises female patients is that hormone replacement therapy works so quickly to alleviate symptoms. At the follow-up visit four to six weeks later, many women report sleeping better, losing weight and improved relationships. They aren't feeling as exhausted or cranky, and their energy levels are no longer zapped.

Death, taxes and menopause may be unavoidable, but bio-identical hormone replacement therapy is a viable natural option to help women address one of those inevitabilities.

*Dr. Carol L. Roberts is a doctor of functional, integrative and holistic medicine, and is medical director at the Naples Center for Functional Medicine. For more information, call 239-649-7400 or visit naplescsm.com.*



**Menopausal women commonly experience hot flashes, mood swings, weight gain, sleep disorders, anxiety, irritability, fatigue, decreased sexual desire and other symptoms.** GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

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