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Menopause

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
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Much misunderstanding exists concerning menopause, commonly referred to as “change of life.” This misunderstanding, based on myths, old wives stories, superstition, etc., has existed since ancient times—it still exists in the minds of many people. For example, have you ever heard that menopause causes certain diseases, such as cancer? That it is the end of normal life functions? That it makes women unattractive?

These are a few of the myths that women have heard concerning menopause. These tales passed on by word of mouth frequently create fear of menopause. It is this fear, based on misinformation, that frequently causes many of the difficulties and trying times experienced by women. The worry and anxiety about the “dreadful” changes brought on by menopause serves to make this normal life process more difficult.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to refute the myths and old wives stories by presenting sound, practical information concerning menopause.

What is Menopause?

Menopause is the end of menstruation. It is a normal stage in a woman’s life indicating the end of her child bearing days. Known commonly as “change of life,” it is nature’s way of protecting women from having children beyond their years of greatest physical energy.

It does not cause women to have cancer or other diseases, nor does it result in a woman becoming fat. It does not cause a woman to become unattractive. It is not an illness.

Menopause is just as normal as the change that occurs during adolescence.
At What Age Can Women Expect Menopause?

Usually menopause occurs between the ages of 40 and 50. It may, however, occur earlier or later in life.

What is the Length of Menopause?

The length of menopause varies a great deal among women. It may take less than one year or more than five years.

What Happens during Menopause?

The menopause may occur in various ways among women. The menstrual periods may end abruptly, but more often the cessation of menstruation is more gradual — generally over a period of years.

Menopause can happen in a number of ways:

1. A woman may find that the time between her regular periods are longer. For example, instead of occurring every 28 days menstruation may occur every 30 to 35 days, with the intervals becoming longer and longer until menstruation stops entirely.

2. A woman may miss one or more periods and then have menstruation to resume again for awhile.

3. She may have regular periods but the menstrual flow is lessened.

4. The menstrual periods may become shorter, lasting 2 or 3 days instead of the previous 5 or more days.

These are normal patterns which menopause may take and are all simply different ways in which healthy women may pass through this natural phase of life.

The most important fact that all women should know about menopause is that irregularities other than those mentioned above are not normal. If menstrual periods appear more frequently; if the flow during periods is heavier; if there is spotting between periods; or if there is any bleeding after periods have ended; you should go to your doctor immediately for an examination. These irregularities may mean serious trouble.

How Does a Woman Feel During Menopause?

Before and during these changes in the menstrual periods certain symptoms may occur such as dizziness, weakness, nervousness, insomnia, and hot or warm flashes. Many women have very mild symptoms, a few have none. In a few cases the discomfort may be severe. There is a different pattern for every wom-
an, so don’t try to figure out your symptoms yourself. Your doctor will be able to help you if you are uncomfortable.

*What Can Your Doctor Do For You During Menopause?

Modern medical treatment is very successful in relieving the distressing symptoms of menopause. Female sex hormones and chemicals— which act like sex hormones—are available to your doctor. Medical care at this time may help nervousness and low spirits which may be present during menopause.

Mental depression is not unusual at this time. Medical assistance can help to relieve the tension and fear that may be due to lack of knowledge as to what is happening to you during menopause. Be frank with your doctor. Discuss with him your physical and mental state. He can help you take your problems in stride as well as you have ever done.

Go to your doctor anytime your menopause starts if you find yourself dreading it.

*Is Life Changed After Menopause?

Remember that the menopause is not a complete change of life. Normal marital relationships do not end with menopause. There is nothing abnormal about the continuation of happy married relations afterwards. Many women enjoy better health after menopause than they have for years.

**Summary**

The life span has steadily increased. If you are a woman between 40 and 50 there is a good chance that over half of your adult life is still ahead of you.

With an understanding, based on sound information, concerning the true nature of menopause, you can expect many years of happy, productive life ahead.