



The Change of Life

Coping With the Effects of Menopause

As you near menopause, you're probably wondering if you're going to be drenched in night sweats and bothered by the hot flashes that you've heard your friends talking about. You can never be guaranteed that your menopausal symptoms will be minimal, but knowledge of the physical and emotional factors involved with menopause can make your passage easier.

What Is Menopause?

Menopause is caused by the cessation of ovulation which results in a woman no longer menstruating. This naturally occurring development occurs in three phases: perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause. Your heredity, hormonal patterns and racial background will influence the age at which you begin menopause. The average age is 52. Women who have an oophorectomy, surgical removal of the ovaries, will experience menopause no matter what their age.

Emotional Effects

During menopause, your body goes through many changes. Fluctuating hormone levels cause mood swings as well as physical symptoms. How well you

weather menopause will depend on how fast your estrogen production shuts down, how happy you are with your life at the time, how supportive your relationships are, the medical help that you receive and how accepting you are of the natural changes in the aging process. Some women see menopause as a relief because they no longer fear pregnancy. Others are reluctant to end their reproductive years.

Events in your family life can also play a part. Anxiety about your children leaving home, your sexual relationship or about what you will be doing the rest of your life can magnify the physical symptoms you are feeling. A positive attitude and talking to a supportive network of friends can help you pass through menopause with a minimum of disruption.

Coping With Physical Symptoms

Hot flashes are a common symptom of menopause. Some women have one a month, others 20 a day, but they usually only last a few minutes. Dressing in lighter clothing can help with hot flashes. Night sweats are hot flashes made worse by being under covers. Changing pajamas and trying to get back to sleep

quickly helps. Eating a high-fiber diet can help reduce other problems like constipation. Involving yourself in weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, and consuming calcium in food or supplements can work with the estrogen to minimize osteoporosis. If vaginal dryness diminishes sexual pleasure, use a lubricating jelly. Menopause need not diminish your sexual satisfaction.

Your doctor may give you a combination of estrogen and progesterone to minimize your physical symptoms. Ask your doctor about any possible side effects of any prescription drug.

When to Seek Help

Most women will be on an even keel two to five years after menopause. Consider professional help if depression is severe, your relationships suffer or you need help getting more balance in your life. If you have been unhappy before menopause the added physical discomforts may make menopause seem worse for you.

Getting help can put your life back on track. Remember the words of the late anthropologist Margaret Mead, "The most creative force in the world is a menopausal woman with zest."